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And all the teeming regions of the south,
Hold not a quarry to the curious flight
Of knowledge half so tempting or so fair
As man to man.

AKENSIDE.

VOL. III.

[SECOND EDITION.]

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CHAPTER I.

She was just risen from her bended knee
But yet peace seemed not with her piety;
For there was paleness upon her young cheek,
And thoughts upon the lips which never speak,
But wring the heart that at the last they break.
Alas! how much of misery may be read
In that wan forehead, and that bowed down head.

* * * * * *

'Tis strange to think, if we could fling aside
The mock mantle that love wears from pride,
How much would be, we now so little guess
Deep in each heart's undreamed, unsought recess.

LANDON.

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MARRIED.

CHAPTER I.

I OFTEN think of our return that evening. I liked walking with Brice at night—the air was so much fresher in the half deserted streets, and as we reached our own door we were welcomed by the scent of my carefully reared mignionette which, encouraged by the evening dew, sent out its ever refreshing odour.

We entered the sitting-room together, which was in darkness, and as I felt about for the

matches, I perceived that a note was on the table.

"Here is a letter, something nice, I hope. Is it for you or for me, I wonder?"

I said this as he lighted the candle, holding the letter in my hand the while. When the light fell upon it, and my eyes, dazzled with the coming out of the darkness could hardly see, I glanced eagerly at the letter, for I was always looking out for something very nice to come in by the post.

But it was not for me, it was for Brice, and the direction was fairly and legibly written in a lady's hand. This was the first letter which had ever been sent to his private residence in a lady's hand, and of course I expected to share it with him. But, instead of this, he took it quietly up, and placed it in his breast pocket.

"Are you not going to open it?" I asked, disappointed; but he seemed suddenly absorbed.

"I dare say it is of no consequence," he said. "Are you going to bed?"

He added this a little testily. Mamma, who spoiled him and put so much sugar in his tea, did not know how short he could be when he liked.

I went to bed with a wild little demon tearing at my heart; even when I bent over my sweet baby, he was there,—and then it was so long before Brice came up, though he had said coming home how tired he was, and how glad he should be to get to sleep. Indeed, though I dared not shew it,—had not even papa said that Brice's anger would be terrible!—I was horribly out of temper. When he did come at last I was, though wide awake, to all appearance in the soundest slumber. His offence was patent and conceivable to the dullest understanding: he had received a letter from a lady and had withheld it from me—nay, he had not even opened it in my presence, so that I might read the ex-

pression of his countenance. If I had not the courage for a curtain lecture, was I not fully justified in making myself as miserable as it was possible to be, and was I not called upon to think wholly of myself and of my own feelings, without giving a thought to how he might be feeling. Do people who quarrel, who refine as it were their own causes of offence, ever think of the pain the supposed offender may be suffering.

Yet for all this, even now I do not think my anger was quite unjustifiable; but I am very doubtful whether Brice was at all aware of it. Except that, perhaps, between man and wife there subsists that subtle essence of friendship by which the thermometer of one's feelings can be marked without a word.

However that may be, we were very polite to each other at breakfast time; only when it came to what the French would call the "supreme moment" of saying good-bye, of

lingering for the few precious minutes in the garden, then I managed to think baby wanted me and to go upstairs.

But when I came down again—when I found that he had really gone, then a passionate regret seized me, and I sat long and indolently in my low chair, with my hands over my face. People may fancy that marriage lessens and altogether tranquillises love: it was not so with me, certainly. Never had I loved him better than now; my lover had been nothing in comparison with my husband. He pervaded my whole being—perhaps, even weighted my existence, and chained it to earth. Is not St. Paul suspicious of this when he says that "the married woman careth for the things of the world that she may please her husband."

I hope it was not very wrong, but I did love Brice very dearly—Brice and my baby. I fear my thoughts were chained down very firmly to the earth, and that the greater part

of my supplications went up to Heaven for them.

I sat a long time moaning in my thoughts to myself, when Ann looked grimly in, and I started up to help clear away the breakfast things, the leaving of which on my part was certainly no healthy sign. Did she guess as much, I wonder?—did she know that though the mignionette smelt so sweetly, and the clematis was so full in bloom that I had not lingered in the garden that morning?—was it to her a tragedy as to me, or did she dismiss it all with the thought that master and missis had fallen out, and so leave it, thinking of the dinner she had to make ready, and the rooms she had to scour? I do not know; I only know that I was very glad when I had given the order for dinner, and she had gone away with the tea things, for I felt too inert to go downstairs, and to pretend to see about me that morning, and to peep into the larder and look wise over the cold potatoes. No, I

could not do it; so I gave the order shortly enough, and took out some papers that I might seem busy, but I was not really so, it was all make believe.

It was so quiet—what place ever does seem so quiet as a London suburb?—when presently, having tranquillised my mind, I opened my Bible for my morning reading—opened it at hazard, trying for comfort. The page I came upon was that which contains that beatiful embodiment of Christian feeling—St. Paul on charity;—that key note, as it has proved, to a new world rising upon the ruins of the old, and spreading wherever that key note has been preserved with sure and steady increase, full, abundant, and ungrudging as the waters which cover the sea.

"Thinketh no evil," those were the words I read, and reading them I thought I had done enough, and so took them for the text of my morning's thoughts. Not say no evil, but think no evil! Ah! how hard! Brice had

had a letter—a letter from a lady, too—and he had not shewn it to me, and I was to let it pass and think no evil of it. Be it so : I closed the book. Could I do this thing—at least I would try.

I went about my morning's work ; I took charge of baby while my little nurse went to iron the tiny pinafores ; for I ruled my house pleasantly, I hope, but with a Lycurgus like economy, for which I think neither myself nor my servants were the least bit more unhappy ; and as for Brice he never knew anything about it, and being absent all day could only faintly guess at the economies which were so cheerfully practised.

But the day was not destined to pass over so uneventfully. Obedient to the advice of the Book, which we should do well to take as our real companion and adviser, I had put away my evil thoughts, and decided that with a man of such a secretive nature as my husband no mystery was enough to trouble

me, and was merry with my baby. So engaged I did not see that a red-liveried servant had come to the gate, not the thirsty coachman, but a man from my new old friend, Mrs. Phillimore. He brought a kind little note from her. She had tickets for the Botanical Fête in Regent's Park. Would I come and take luncheon with her mother, and go with them, and they would drive me home.

It was a very kind note, evidently coming from good natured pity for me, who had lived so long out of the world. The man waited for an answer, and Ann in her own mind, though flattered by the thought that our grander neighbours should see his fine appearance, secretly wished him gone. She doubtless feared, lest he might be drawing a contrast between his master's establishment and hers, very much to her disadvantage; she, therefore, hastened me to a decision, and begged me by all means to go.

If I could ask Brice, I felt sure that

he would say yes; he was rather anxious to cultivate society, he called it a good school. Nay, he would be rather angry if I declined. My bonnet, a pretty white chip, neatly trimmed, would not perhaps be so gossamer like as Mrs. Phillimore's, but I was too accustomed to these things not to be certain that it would do very well; and my gloves, why they had been new last Sunday. Yes, I would go, and I wrote a line to say so, and sent the man away to Ann's great satisfaction. To her I carefully explained where I was going, most politely left my friend's note for Brice to read, told her to give him his dinner punctually, and not to wait for me, though I should be home if I could, and accepted her assistance in dressing, placing both my baby and my little nurse in her solemn charge. Ann was very grim, but I trusted her, and oh, I so hoped she began to love me just a little. I took a pathetic leave of baby, for it was always a trial to me to leave her,

and then Ann accompanied me to the gate, saying cheerfully—did she like me really, I wonder?—"that she did not think any Mrs. Phillimore would look better than I did, so neat and like a lady as I was." This was very satisfactory, and I smiled back a good day to her, and started on my way to find an omnibus. The omnibus, that much abused article of conveyance, took me very conveniently near my May Fair destination, so that I was able to pass easily down the street and make my arrival in ample time.

The butler was pleased to recognise me this time, and had evidently got over his surprise at my being able to give a double knock at the door myself, without the interposition of a footman, so that I felt quite comfortable and at home.

When I met Mrs. Phillimore, however, I began to suspect that Ann was wrong. I was very contented with my lot, proud and happy in it, and would not have exchanged it for

anybody's, but yet I could not on that account fail to see when other people's clothes were better and more in keeping and more fashionable than my own.

Mrs. Phillimore, though not tall, was large, massive and fair, and her eyes were really blue. No, I do not think she had need to fear the beauty of any governess, however Grecian her form, or passionate her eyes. My friend was supremely content with herself, quietly so, with a satisfaction which could not fail to be infectious; and from this reason, doubtless, she never seemed to exaggerate the perfections of others so as to raise in herself any ill-natured jealousy.

She received me most kindly and easily. I was to take luncheon with them, that had been the invitation, and I hoped that luncheon meant an early dinner for the children, for I was greatly desirous to see Miss Butler again, and to see her, too, of a morning, and by the light of day.

It was as I thought, and when Mrs. Phillimore took me to the dining-room, I found the children seated with grandmamma in the full dignity of her office, and Miss Butler with them. Oh, she was more beautiful by day, with a beauty which almost took my breath away, and I thought when she saw me, she had that startled look which had so annoyed me in Brice.

I talked of course, and listened and attended to all the courtesies of the table, and tried to make friends with the children, but all the while I watched the governess. I felt certain now that she was the original of the photograph which had given me so much pain. I speculated upon her age, older than myself I think she was, more clever I thought too, with a depth of passionate earnestness sleeping in her black eyes, which must I thought have found its way to any man's heart. And Meta had told me, Meta who had gathered such a large experience,

that a man's righteousness was not like our righteousness, was not the same kind of thing at all. Men thought no harm of platonic attachments, and played little dangerous games which confiding wives, such as she believed me to be, knew nothing at all about.

In short, life was all an enigma to me. I had come out of my happy, thoughtless girlhood, to find that that life was full of mysterious and dark temptations, that to walk through it was like threading one's way blindfold through heated ploughshares; and Meta had clouded it over still more for me, with her vague hints and constant doubts of the virtues of mankind and so had made it doubly dark and dangerous for me. Since, and now that I am old enough to look back with sane eyes, I have come to think that all that is dark and misty in life is but a shadowy cloud, mysteriously and maliciously raised by the great enemy of the human soul, and that read by the light of Christianity life need have no

darkness, no mystery in it all. Why not walk with the wise trustfulness of a little child looking to its own steps, but seldom presumptuous enough to doubt the steps of others.

What had Brice done I ask myself now—loving husband, just and honest merchant provident and prayerful father as he had ever seemed to be. What had he done that my jealous fancy should arm itself against him, and find out so much of imaginary wrong. I said all this to myself even while outwardly I was sharing Mrs. Phillimore's fears that it might rain and spoil all the show where we were to admire and be admired; ourselves, perhaps, being the most interesting flowers in the garden—by ourselves, of course, I mean the living mass of human beings who presently were to crowd the gardens

We were, mamma, grandmamma, and myself, for the show, and the governess and the children for a sober walk by the Serpentine.

Did Brice ever fall in with them on his way home from the city, I asked myself, as I heard the order, and then despised myself for the asking. Alas! is not jealousy cruel as the grave.

Perhaps some jealous woman, if she ever comes across these thoughts of mine, will despise and condemn me, until startled, she finds that she has so condemned herself. Human nature is but a mirror into which looking steadily we often see our own face.

Miss Butler was so silent; how I longed to hear her speak a whole collective sentence, something more than the simple assent or dissent, to which she confined herself. Was she clever as well as beautiful I wonder? Did she speak many languages. Of course! would grandmamma, who had had the choice, have chosen otherwise for her daughter's children.

CHAPTER II.

And Eva listened;—music's power
Is little felt in sunlit hour;
But hear its voice when hopes depart,
Like swallows, flying from the heart
On which the summer's late decline
Has set a sadness and a sign;
When friends whose commune once we sought
For every bosom wish and thought,
Have given in our hour of need
Such a support as gives the reed—
* * * * * * *
How deeply will the spirit feel
The lute, the song's sweet-voiced appeal;
And how the heart drink in their sighs
As echoes they from Paradise!

LANDON.

CHAPTER II.

I COULD detect no flaw in Miss Butler, watch her as closely as I would, although I could perceive that she also kept up a furtive watch on me. But, in truth, jealousy is blind as well as cruel—as blind as love—more so, perhaps, because to build up our jealous fancies we accredit the accused with everything save honesty, while love, in its very tenderness for its object pityingly detects the least flaw.

Presently the children were hurried off by impetuous managing grandmamma, to finish

their lessons before getting ready for their walk, and for us the carriage would soon be ready. I went with Mrs. Phillimore to her room, and presently returned with her through the hall to the morning room, to wait for our summons.

Upon the hall table lay a letter, which Mrs Phillimore took up. It had come by post, but being for the governess no one had been found as yet to deliver it. She would find it, perhaps, on her way to her walk, an hour or so hence.

"If there is one thing I do disapprove of in governesses, it is too much correspondence," said Mrs. Phillimore, "and particularly when their correspondents write very badly. It looks so common, besides taking up so much time. But this is something ultra good—a real gentleman's letter ; and what a splendid peculiar hand. I hope my pretty governess has not picked up a love affair ; or, alas ! for the French exercises." Thus wandered on in

her sweet, easy tones, my friend, showing a kind of half-aroused interest. Then, with a little dissatisfied look, as if she were accustomed to have her own way, and felt that the seal was an impertinence to her, she laid down the latter in its place, saying, as she did so, "Is it not a fine hand?"

I turned to look. I knew it was not quite right, nay, I fear very much otherwise, thus to be impertinently speculating on the business of another; but it was difficult to avoid it, lying there before my very eyes. I turned to look. Could I be mistaken? No, it was impossible. The writing was that of my own husband! bold, clear, and peculiar, no two people could have written a hand like that. I raised the letter—at least having seen so much I would be sure. The seal was his, familiar and well known to me, and the business paper such as he wrote with from his counting house. I put it down and made no sign. Not a sigh escaped me; so complete

was my self-possession that I do not think I even changed colour; but if I could have died that moment and gone altogether out of this wicked world I should have been glad. Glad! was such a word ever to be associated with me again.

I turned and smiled in acquiescence, when Mrs. Nelson came hurrying into the hall to ask if we were ready.

"Yes, quite ready," I answered, courteously, and I stepped with them into the carriage.

"We shall have a glorious day," exclaimed grandmamma, "even yet."

I assented, and added that it was a good thing the rain had gone off.

It did not take us very long, in that nice comfortable carriage, with its pair of horses, to reach the Regent's Park, where we soon found ourselves amidst the entering band of gaily dressed people.

At this moment I saw that the kid of my

glove had given way, showing a little bit of white. It seemed odd to me that the circumstance should occupy my attention ever so little, but it did. It seemed to bring an accession of misery and annoyance.

It was indeed a glorious day! The sun shone through softening clouds, which made the weather cool as beautiful. And the flowers—sweet, precious, innocent companions of our daily path—how they glowed upon me and talked to me, as no one in that great fashionable crowd could talk. What wonderful sympathy they had for me, these beautiful things which we Londoners so greatly appreciate.

"Oh! how lovely; do you not enjoy it? Is not that music delicious?" languidly observed my unexcitable friend.

"Delicious," I echoed; but I thought, "would that I could lie down upon this fairy turf, studded as it is with all nature's love-

liness, and weep away my life. Anything so that I might never go home again."

The band was playing "Home sweet Home," a tune never, I think, to be heard by English ears with indifference.

Then presently we met some mutual old friends, and Mrs. Nelson introduced me as married.

One of these was an elderly man of the world, who knew everybody and forgot everything. He remembered me, but had probably quite forgotten my change of circumstances. He was full of jests upon my happiness, jests which yesterday I could have given back with ready tongue; to-day, oh! how dull I had grown.

"So," said this tiresome man, never thinking whether he might wound or not. "Your husband let's you come out alone, and is not jealous, eh? I hope you have not come to be like the little man and woman in

the rain houses, when one is at home the other is sure to be out, eh? Have you got a good husband, my dear?"

Insufferable man; he thought himself a wit, because he said what other men's good breeding kept them from saying. How easy to be witty at such a cost!

"Ah! yes, indeed," answered my friend for me. "You should not be so sharp and clever, Mr. Singlethorp."

Clever, indeed! he had simply been rude; but Mrs. Phillimore fell so kindly and easily into other peoples desires that I think since he wished to be witty she would not have taken the trouble to test his wit on any account, but accepted it willingly at his own valuation.

"You guarantee it then," said he, glancing with what he meant to be knowing looking eyes at my changing colour, for wit with some men means putting young people out of countenance. "You are sure she has a good

husband? I am glad of it, but I do not always take your word; you are apt to judge other people's husbands by their kindness to you—ha! ha!—which is not perhaps all convincing to the world itself."

This man then thought with Meta, and what awakened her sarcasm was to him but a sorry jest.

"Poor trifler!" I thought as he, and his friends were soon carried away—for a few steps sufficed to lose them amidst the fashionable crowd—"life and its deep realities is so little to you, or perhaps, after all, you try to hide them with a jest."

My husband—my good, tender, thoughtful, self-denying, home-staying husband—to be likened to the vain men of the world, with whom this man spent his time. Shame upon the thought! The outspoken suspicion shocked me so much that I felt it could not be true, and though I had been nourishing it in my bosom for these two hours past, I now turned

from it as from an ugly, slimy reptile, whose very sight revolted me.

Under this revulsion of feeling I found a ready explanation for what had pained me. Miss Butler had probably asked some favour—an order for a museum, a vote for some charity, a nomination to a school, and Brice, in his never-failing kindness, had been able to grant the favour, and, making no stir about his charity, had simply written, and there ended the matter. I knew something by this time of my husband's secretive ways, and could imagine that if this had been the case, he would not have mentioned it. Perhaps, after my little ebullition of temper, preferred leaving the pretty governess's name alone.

For Miss Butler, too, I began to find a ready excuse. Poor governesses are so forced upon the world and upon their own resources, that we can hardly expect them to be bound by the reticence which is the habit of a true-

bred English women. Hybrids as they are in position, they at one time assume the affectation of a fine lady, and at another the independence of a maid servant. Parents little think what they are about when they overflood the governess market with helpless, half educated girls, to be returned upon their hands, perhaps with broken health, and habits above their station, if no worse.

I began quite to pity Miss Butler, thinking what a snare her beauty was likely to prove to her, and what a happy thing it was for her that if she had any favour to ask, and should imprudently have made it the motive for a correspondence, that she should have fallen into such good hands as those of my husband.

With these thoughts I began to tire of the flower show, and to feel a comfortable, yearning longing for my baby, and to wonder if Brice's dinner was as comfortable without me, and whether he would be very sorry not

to find me at home. Ah, it would be a pity if my passionate outbreak had been heard, if I had really laid down upon the smooth turf and died, leaving those two whom I loved so well, and mamma—but with her, of course, my loss would not be so great now. I was married; I was not to her now—I could not be as I once had been. She was centreing her thoughts on Lucy now, and it was well —Lucy remained to be a comfort to her.

Mothers set their hearts on getting their daughters married; but I think they love their single ones best. So that now I could not look back to my old home for peace and happiness, I must find both or lose both in the new one which Heaven had chosen for me.

No, I would not think more about the letter. Was not the opening of strife like the letting out of water, and could I not faintly discern how indignant my husband would be if he could have read my thoughts

that afternoon. I would go home grateful for the love to overflowing which made that home so pleasant to me. And then was I not in the middle of braiding such a beautiful pelisse for my baby—such nice, new, fascinating work.

But my friends were well used to this lounging kind of life, and tried to make it last its full time; but at length it was time to go and we could escape. I felt a strange compunction and repentance, and longed to be at home, and was glad when we were briskly on our way to Kensington.

It was Brice himself who let me in, who came to the carriage door to thank my friends for their kindness; he was bareheaded, and how nicely he had brushed his hair and made it curl at the side, and how the coachman touched his hat when he managed so adroitly to slip a something into his hand, not seeming a bit afraid of his grandeur.

I could see that my lady friends were

pleased with my young husband, for they lingered to talk with him a while; then presently they drove off with many smiles and parting bows. And then—yes, this was home, sweet home—Brice kissed me in the passage, and whispered as he did so that I was his pretty dear little wife. And I—oh! who could remember the letter!—I let him kiss me, and looking up with grateful eyes, full of moisture, told him the fête was very fine and grand, but I was so glad to be at home again. Then springing upstairs, I found my other treasure,—my Phœnix—my darling, peerless baby—peerless for me at least in all the world.

CHAPTER III.

He hath a daily beauty in his life,
That makes me ugly.

SHAKESPEARE.

Mar. As you love me, give way.
Leon. I will give none, madam.
I stand upon the ground of mine own honour,
And will maintain it; you shall know me now
To be an understanding, feeling man.

GARRICK.

CHAPTER III.

I do not think it was really want of steadfastness of purpose which made me so changeable, but rather that the steadfastness which I did possess led me to cling to my trust in Brice, and to the deep love I had for him. Having accounted for his behaviour in my own mind, I felt quite glad that I had not spoken of it to him, but rather that we had settled down into a peace and confidence more complete, so it seemed that night than anything which had existed between us for the week past. I was, indeed, ready to speak of

the fête as if I had enjoyed it, and to tell Brice of that odious Mr. Singlethorp, as if I had not been so deeply annoyed by him.

"I suppose," he said, with a smile, "his idea of a good husband was a man rich enough to drive you to the gardens, and to lounge there by your side; I fear he would not accept as such a busy city man, who can only look at his wife's new bonnet on a Sunday."

I was resting on the sofa after the fatigues of the day, with an ottoman for my feet and his shoulder, if I remember right, for my pillow, and no back was ever half so easy as his strong arm.

"You are altogether full of self-conceit," I said, laughing. "I saw it in your face when you came with such a confident air to the carriage door; your very look, and the way in which you had brushed your hair, seemed to say that you were sure there was no one in the fête so fascinating as yourself."

"Only to one," said Brice, "my conceit goes no farther; and it is odd if I cannot be completely master of such a small thing as you are."

"Do not be insulting," I answered. "Most of our great heroes have been little men, and why should not little women be somebodies?"

"Of course she is a somebody," said my husband, patronizingly, "or I should not have married her. But it does seem funny to me that being so small she should be of so much consequence; that I who could crush her, and break all her bones with my strong arms, should be afraid of her."

"Afraid!" said I, opening wide my eyes and raising my head that I might look at him.

He drew my head down again before he answered.

"In no bad sense, I assure you, so do not look so scared; only I should like to

awaken your contempt, small as you are, as little, perhaps, as you would like to awaken mine."

"If I had anything I wished to conceal from you, I should be very afraid, but I have not," I answered, earnestly.

"You are a happy, little woman," he said. "I think wives should have no secrets from their husbands."

"Nor husbands from their wives."

"They would be happier without such secrets," he assented, thoughtfully; "but then they are forced to have them—confidences come to them which they are forced to keep."

"Are they?" I said; "then I am sorry for them. I would rather be myself with no secrets to keep."

"Yes, but every one is not so happy, dear one; and even you look heavy sometimes, as if you carried some burden."

I trembled: had he detected my jealous

fancies,—and yet how tender he was of me. I could not tell him I never had a burden: had I not that very day wished that I might never go home again? Could such a wish have been possible, I thought; surely I had only dreamt it.

"Sometimes I fancy," went on my husband, in his most unusual fit of confidence, "that you will get tired of humble life, and that is why I have been so anxious to bring you to the knowledge of your old friends."

I think the best thing for me, and for him, at that moment, would have been, that I should have told him all my mind; but I could not. What had I against him; but that I had seen a letter come to him which he had not shown to me, and that he had written one which I had decided, contained nothing less innocent than a favour which a City man might find it easy to grant to a friendless girl? How could I tell him such things? Would he not have withdrawn his arm and started

from me in horror and contempt? I thought all this when I should have been answering his question, and seeing that I continued silent, he went on, a little sadly, I thought.

"I will try hard," he said, "that you shall not repent."

"I thought a little while since," I said, rousing myself to answer, "you were rather over confident of your dominion over a certain small person."

"You said so, not I," he answered; but I could see that he was a little vexed, that I had, as it were, evaded the point, and had not met his fancy half-way.

"You never repent having trusted me; you never have," he insisted, a little impetuously.

There came to me, as seen, by a sudden flash, all the thoughts of the morning, all my doubts, all my horror; and yet, with them all, and even in the midst of them all, would I have wished that I had never been bound

to him—bound, as nothing in him had the power altogether to do away. No, I had never repented to that extent; and yet, while considering whether I had or no, the answer came—or was coming—too late to satisfy him. Before it had reached my lips, he had laid me gently back upon the sofa, so gently, as if I had been an infant whom he feared to awaken, and rose himself. The moment of confidence was gone, and I had not the courage to recall it.

"Do not disturb yourself," he said, "you are tired. I will enter the accounts to-night."

I submitted; in truth, since the introduction of the private book, I had lost my zeal in the accounts. No longer did I hold triumphantly in my own hands the key to my husband's honesty. He had shut, as it were, an inner door upon his confidence. With us women, work is often a matter of sentiment; weak and feeble as we are, compared to men, we can be moved by our affections to great

efforts, and wounded there, we fail—falling to the ground as helpless as the bird with broken wing.

I took up a book and read. Brice had given me time for a quick answer—and in some cases failing a ready one, no other answer is possible or satisfactory—but he had not waited to probe my humour, or to investigate my sickly fancies. Perhaps it would have been well for him if he, indulging a weak woman, had been for a little while as weak and childish as herself. But, as I have said, my husband was a man, sometimes leaning too completely to the manhood that was within him. His marriage should have been the softening element: but then, if he was losing confidence in me, holding back secrets from me; if distrust on my side was stealing in, and breaking the spell which never should be broken. Why, then, Brice would go on growing harder—blinder to the little feelings of others. In time, we in our small house, would

be living as fashionable couples lived in their larger ones. Only if it was so, luxury would be better than poverty. If you must sulk with your husband, it would be easier to do it in a carriage round the park, or an opera box, with its solace of other company. Ungenerous! These were the thoughts which followed me, even while I read, and seemed absorbed in my reading. Nay, if asked for the tale I read, I could distinctly have narrated it; and yet, ever side by side went on the dream of my own thoughts. Did such trains of thought, I wondered, ever run side by side with sounder calculations in my husband's wiser head?

There he sat, intent upon his books—intent upon that business which is a healthy employment for any man—or was he solving the difficult problem of what should, or should not be hidden away in his private book?

I rose at last, and told him I was tired, and should go to bed, or would he rather that I stayed.

"No, he was coming directly," he answered, absorbed; and I went upstairs to my baby. Perhaps she would comfort me. My dear baby! She was awake, but not fretful as babies sometimes are at night, and she smiled at me with my husband's eyes. My pretty trusting child! who confided in me so entirely, thought me the most reliable person in the world, and was not old enough to write clandestine letters, or to have a private book into which I could not look. I sat down in the rocking chair and played with her, and made her laugh, and laughed myself into a good humour. But I fear it was all very provoking to Brice, who, when he came up, found that I had not even taken down my hair, or advanced to the dressing gown stage. Yet, I think he liked baby almost as well as

I did; so he sat down and played with her too, and in her innocent smiles, I think he forgot his displeasure at my silence, that is if he really was displeased.

CHAPTER IV.

Lucile. Eh bien ! on n'aime pas par un commandement.
Prière, ordre, conseils, n'y peuvent rien, personne
Ne sait pourquoi le cœur se refuse ou se donne,
Et tu voudrais aimer, contre son bon plaisir,
Que tu ne pourrais pas, toi-même, y réussir.

* * * * * *

Dieu nous a fait un cœur cependant ; je suppose
Que, s'l nous l'a donné, c'est bien pour quelque chose:
En est-il un plus doux, plus innocent emploi,
Que l'amour dans l'hymen, le roman dans la loi !
Et n'est-ce pas enfin la félicité pure,
Que le devoir conforme au vœu de la nature ?

PONSARD.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning I did not fail to accompany Brice to the gate, and to linger with him beneath the clematis covered porch. I thought he seemed a little sad, and I was anxious without words to remove any impressions he might have received yesterday with regard to my attachment to him. He should have known I thought how dearly I loved him, how I waited upon his moods, construed his slightest actions, and lived upon his affection. But I do not quite know now when I

look back how he was to read all this, particularly as my feelings were as often as not covered by a reticence born at once of pride and delicacy.

I knew he had some heavy matters on hand, that he was, as usual, engaged in ventures, which, though kept within the bounds of his means, as often as not strained the risk of those means to the utmost. I did not then wonder that he should look serious as he went forth to his day's work; for who, indeed, could tell what a day would bring forth. Seized by a sudden impulse which I could not resist, and which arose from the serious expression which I read in his face, I said to him, as I held him back a moment by laying my hand upon his arm—

"Brice, you are not venturing beyond your depth; tell me—oh! do, for it is so hard to feel your trust withdrawn. Your private book does not mean that, does it?"

With him as with me yesterday; there was

no ready answer, but I gave him time. I pleaded with him as much by my silence as by my words.

"You make a great deal," he said, a little shortly, "of what is an ordinary thing. Perhaps it is a pity you ever took the accounts; it seems to make you restless and uneasy."

"Never," I said, firmly; "when I went with you in everything I felt no uneasiness. Our ventures were honest, and I prayed and trusted for their good issue."

He looked down with an incredible softness in his eyes.

"Pray for me still," he said; "hitherto your prayers have been like favouring gales; everything to which I have put my hand has prospered."

"Do not reckon upon such prosperity, however," I said, earnestly. "Do not over speculate. The great present sin of our nation is that dishonesty which men disguise under the name of the usages of trade."

"I know it, dear wife; why do you doubt me?"

"Only," I said pathetically, and with tears in my eyes, "because you no longer trust me."

Brice sighed a scarcely perceptible sigh; he looked, I thought, as if he wished to confide in me, but that something held him back.

Already, perhaps—and according to my usual custom, I was very ready to build up fancies—he was becoming entangled. How many a man, beginning business at his age, and with so small a capital in hand, has found his hands tied up before he is aware, even when he is trying to do his very best.

"I told you," he said; and there was a sadness in his tone, I thought—"that men are often forced to carry secrets."

"Ah! but—" I answered, quickly, "it is an unwise thing. Remember, you have but to say a word, and I can economise far—far more than I am doing. I do not a bit mind carrying out baby myself; and though I

should grieve to part with Ann, yet if it were necessary—why, you don't know how useful I can be."

"I know it well," said Brice. "I know all your value, and Heaven forbid that I should rob you of a single comfort."

"But I would not mind in the least bit, only—except parting with Ann; that would be a trial."

"Would it? then be assured that you are not called upon to do it. I will not disguise from you that a certain economy is needed, but not to that extent. Good-bye, dear; rest your sweet heart contented. I may be a fool sometimes, but not to the extent you would believe."

Then he kissed me, and went away, hurrying off and saying he must run to catch the omnibus. I should not, perhaps, have kept him, but often our most serious business is executed at such odd times and seasons.

I turned back into the house—dismay in

my heart. It was then necessary to economise; he acknowledged that, but not to the extent of dismissing his servants. I found Ann clearing the breakfast things, with the sitting-room window open.

She gave some reason for doing what was unusual to her, but there was an unaccustomed softness in her face and manner. I think myself that she had heard part of our conversation—at least, that part which related to herself; for she was more and more anxious to please me as the days went on, and as the few words she had heard perhaps sank deeper and deeper into her heart.

That day I ordered a still simpler dinner than usual. I restrained myself from buying a new dress for baby, upon which I had set my heart, and having done all this I tried to be contented. I had seated myself with baby at my feet, in my little drawing-room, to wile away the hottest part of the afternoon, when Meta drove up in the carriage of her patron-

ness. She came in hurried and heated, saying, with importance and almost with complaint—

"Ann says there is no beer in the house; how very tiresome this hot day. May she go round to the public-house and fetch some?"

I drew out sixpence from my purse, and stayed Ann as she was departing from showing my visitor in.

"Give the coachman this, and tell him he can drive round and get some for himself," I said, a little coldly; but I repented this a moment afterwards, when I saw that Meta looked really troubled and excited.

"What is the matter?" I asked, in some anxiety, as I found the most comfortable chair for her, and relieved baby from her excited embrace, which had terrified the poor child not a little.

"My dear," she said, excitement mingling with a kind of feverish impatience, "I have done what I fear I may repent."

I looked apprehensive. Sisters, perhaps, are not in the habit of taking each other's hands as friends do, and so I only drew a little nearer to her in my anxiety to hear more.

"Yesterday," said Meta, "Mr. Masterman asked me to be his wife, and I have not refused him."

"You have not accepted him," I said, earnestly.

"No; but I have promised to meet him in the square after dinner to-night, and to give him his answer then."

"That answer," I said.

I was, indeed, afraid to assume anything with Meta.

"When a woman hesitates," said Meta, with a jerk, "a man expects but one answer."

"It may be so," I replied; "but there is yet time if you repent; and if you have taken time to think you have a right to use it."

"That is it," she said, still with her feverish manner, so unlike a contented satisfied affection; "the more I think the more I am impelled to accept him. There is a fate in these things."

"Do not think that you, with your strong will, Meta, cannot have your own way if you choose," I said. "Papa dislikes the idea of it; he spoke to me of it with fear. Is there any cause?"

"None," she said, "except some nonsense about his first wife, a poor, silly child, not fit to cope with a man like him."

"Is it not said that he ill-used her."

"People say all sorts of things," said Meta, peevishly; "but I tell you this, I could not put up with a tame, mawkish individual, for my part. I like a man with a spice of spirit in him."

"Granted," I said, "spirit; but that does not mean a wicked temper. Papa says that

Mr. Masterman has his own way, and that his way is not always a good one."

"Papa likes no one but Brice; I daresay he has his faults under the rose," she answered, tossing her head.

Somehow she always resented my husband's virtues, and would, I think, have liked him better if she could have laid her hand upon a broad blotch here and there. But I was too concerned about her to resent anything upon Brice's account, besides which had he not begun to seem human even in my eyes.

"Do you love this man?" I asked.

She looked at me furtively, a glitter in her eyes.

"I feel that for him," she said, speaking in reply almost sullenly, "that I have no power to escape him. I must marry him whether I like it or not."

"Do not meet him to-night," I entreated; "write and refuse him quietly and decisively.

You do not love him—this is not love; you mistake it altogether. If you loved you would feel so happy; you would not need to talk to me like this. It is only the excitement of indecision."

"I am not undecided. I know that I shall marry him, and at his own time. If he told me to go to church to-morrow I would go."

I knew that it was not so, as she said; that indeed she had come to give me an opportunity of saying all I could, of resenting what I might say, no doubt, for it was very difficult to keep from quarrelling with Meta; but still that she had come in a state of indecision. But what could I say? I knew so little of the merits of the case, nothing personally of Mr. Masterman. I could only beg her to pause and think well for herself—to consult with papa; but I perceived that she was in a whirl in her own thoughts, and that she was far too hurried and excited to be able to think for herself.

"Stay with us to-night, you will be quiet and tranquil here," I said; "and send home a note of excuse with the carriage."

She would not hear of this.

"My life is very intolerable," she explained, in a sudden burst of confidence. "I made the best of it so long as there was no hope, but now that I can escape from it to a life of ease and luxury, where I can be my own mistress, I quite pant for liberty."

"Would it be liberty?" I asked; "papa thought not; he feared that—"

"Well," said she sharply, and I, having got into a dilemma, was forced to answer—

"He feared that you would not give way, and that neither would he, and so that it would end badly for both."

"I will risk that," said Meta, as if opposition had at once fired her into decision.

"If you truly loved him," I said, "love would soften all this; but you do not, Meta, you do not."

"How do you know?" she answered, with asperity.

"Stay with us to-night," I urged, vehemently, "stay and talk with Brice."

"No, no, not that," she answered, turning pale to the lips; "the two men are so different; they could not judge of each other."

Then I knew that Mr. Masterman was a bad man, and that papa's judgment of him was true.

"Papa," I said, feeling terrified, "is moving on your account, that he may give you a home of which you need not be ashamed."

"At Notting Hill," she said scornfully. Alas and alas for the mischief done by pride and discontent.

"We are getting on," I said; "the business flourishes, though economy is needed. Perhaps in time the past may be retrieved."

"In time," said Meta, coldly, "in time; but what we want is time present while

we have power to enjoy, before our pulses grow slow and weary. Good-bye, dear; what is worth talking ourselves into a headache for—nothing that I see."

I put my hand upon her arm to stay her.

"Send back the carriage, and remain to-night," I urged.

She stooped and kissed me, hastily freeing herself from my earnest touch, and swept down stairs and out to the carriage, not turning back, though I followed her to the door, until the carriage was fairly started, then she gaily kissed her hand, and the next instant sank back wearily into the luxurious carriage.

That look of weariness haunted me, as I hurried back to my baby—my little innocent child. I caught her up from the floor, where she had been so contentedly playing, and pressed her in my arms, as if I would shelter her from some future danger. Truly, I thought, daughters are more anxious possessions even

than sons. Men may be pushed out into the open stream of life, and favouring gales may be sought for them without disguise; but daughters—ah, well!—if they have restless spirits, like Meta, it is very hard to feel that they must have nothing done to advance them, and so be driven, like her, upon the poor chances of an ambitious marriage. "Oh! my darling," I said, to my little child, "may it be your good fortune to love only a good man. The love of money is truly but the root of all evil."

I forgot; it may be seen that I was beginning to match-make for my daughter, even in her cradle.

CHAPTER V.

Had it pleased Heaven
To try me with affliction, had he rain'd
All kinds of sores, and shames, on my bare head;
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips;
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes
I should have found in some part of my soul
A drop of patience * * *
* * * * * * * *
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart;
Where either I must live, or bear no life:
The fountain from the which my current runs
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!

OTHELLO.

CHAPTER V.

I TOLD Brice all that had passed with Meta when he came home that night. No reticence of his I felt ought to keep back any confidence of mine. Besides, when evening came, I usually became tired of my days of silence, and liked, of all things, to hear my own voice.

I must say that Brice was always indulgent with me. Indeed, I had grown to fancy that he liked to hear me as much as I liked to talk. This night he put aside the careful

thoughts with which he had returned home, to listen to me gravely and attentively.

"Poor Meta," he said, and, keen-sighted as he usually was, I think he saw less of Meta's shortcomings than I did. When my husband shut his eyes of his own free will, it was a very difficult task to open them.

"Do you know anything of Mr. Masterman?" I asked.

"Only through your father. I hear he is very rich, and has a good house in Cambridge Terrace, and another somewhere in the country; but if Meta does not really care for him, poor girl, it is but a bad prospect."

His brown eyes met mine with such an expression of yearning affection in them, as might have satisfied any woman.

"I hope papa may be over particular," I said. "Meta is quite jealous of you. She says no one would do for papa after you."

He smiled with one of those radiances which illuminated his face. What I liked so

much in him was his genuine affection for the dear father whom we all loved so well.

"She need not be jealous," he said. "In a little time I hope both your sisters will be placed above the necessity of a rich marriage."

I felt puzzled. That morning he had confessed to the necessity for economy. Now he spoke with the confidence of a man secure and at his ease. I knew enough of business to understand a little of its extraordinary fluctuations; but Brice was I knew too accustomed to weigh its chances to veer round with every wind that blew.

"There never should be any necessity. Money has far less to do with the happiness of life than many other things have," I said.

"Still the want of it is a great temptation," said Brice, quietly: "he who prayed to be given neither poverty nor riches knew that one was as trying as the other. Poverty reduces the mind to many shifts, and brings

it so in contact with the real and the actual that it hardens the mind as mathematics do."

"We are very happy," I said; "and yet every expense of ours is a calculation."

"But we have each other," said my husband, drawing me nearer to him; "and having you, I often forget the narrowness of our means: besides which we are on the road to better days."

"Yet this morning you seemed in fear," I said, wondering.

He coloured—I could see it—even beneath the soft whisker, with which his cheek was adorned.

"You used to be too cautious," I said, "to fear in the morning, and be so confident at night."

He laughed slightly—was it to hide the risen colour with which his face was dyed?

"Did I not tell you that poverty has its temptations?" he said. "You, who are too young for anything but hope, begin to fear

like a little miser, and are always watching my face for signs of coming woe. This ought not to be, but it is the natural temptation of poverty to narrow the mind and to concentrate it on self—beware of it darling!"

We were already at cross purposes. Fear poverty, indeed! I had no such fear—I think I could cheerfully have taken my place as a beggar by his side, and have gone out carrying my baby through the flowery lanes where I had seen other beggars wandering. My fears were not directed so: two bugbears alone terrified me, the private book, and the still more private correspondence. I seemed —even as his arm twined itself round me, and drew me, as it were, into shelter, with a strength which seemed doubly great to me because I was so small and fragile—to feel that he was slipping from my grasp, and ever more and more eluding my firm possession.

"Change and decay," I said, "in all around, I see! and you may change, Brice."

"And so may you," he retorted, cheerfully; but I thought with at the same time a twinkle in his eye, which said "I know better."

"Men are far more changeable than women!"

"Are they?" he returned, with the same imperturbable good humour; "then you must excuse them, and put it down to the weakness of a lower nature."

"You know I do not think women better than men," I returned, quickly; "a truly good man is somehow as much better than a good woman, as a bad woman is worse than a bad man; but if Meta is true, a man finds it very difficult to be good. Who is it that said—

> 'Thou knowest that Thou hast made me,
> With passions wild and strong;
> And listening to their witching voice,
> Has often led me wrong.'"

"I think," said my husband, quietly, "that they were the verses of a man who seldom

attempted to govern himself at all. "Is it to him that you liken me, my jealous child?"

"Men fall into danger unawares," I said.

I was indeed doing my best in a kind and quiet way to caution him against platonic friendship with pretty governesses, but he did not seem to understand me.

"But that is no reason why little women should fall into them with their eyes open," he replied.

"I?"

My eyes opened very wide at this accusation.

"Yes—why should you fear what does not exist?" he answered; "why should you let foolish thoughts come into your head as that I may change? Are you not now my very self, and are not those passions, which your poet describes as 'wild and strong,' all centred in you?—their very strength should give you confidence."

I laid my head down upon his shoulder,

drinking in with thirsty heart these professions of his affection. I needed these assurances; unlike firm and self-reliant man, I longed for them to establish my own faith.

"Do you love me still," I whispered, "as you always did?"

His answer was a kiss upon my lips.

"Are you sure," I still whispered, "that you will never meet with any one whom you would wish that you had married instead of me?"

He held me from him, so that he might look earnestly and wonderingly in my face: mine were drooping, but his eyes were I knew searching mine. He looked like the one sinned against—I blushed and faltered as if the fault lay with me—yet he could see, I think, in spite of this that I was in earnest.

"Is my darling ill?" he asked, at length; "that she indulge such sickly fancies."

At his clear, cheerful voice asking the question, they seemed—these fears—to shrink away, and fell out of sight ashamed.

"What would you say," he went on, and anger seemed to grow with the words, "if I asked you such a shameful question?"

His flashing eye made me feel that the question was indeed shameful. I escaped from the hands which held me back and shrank down upon his breast, hiding my face upon the folds of his white shirt.

"Forgive me, Brice," I said, "I am very foolish sometimes."

"But you will not be so foolish again, as you would hesitate to accuse me of dishonesty or forgery, or any other heinous crime; so you will not again risk my anger, by supposing I could cease to love the woman I have taken to my heart."

He spoke so solemnly, his words came out with such emphasis that I could not choose but be convinced and happy, though humbled. I did my very best that evening to show him how entirely I accepted and was thankful for what he had said.

CHAPTER VI.

Val. Treacherous man!
Thou hast beguiled my hopes; nought but mine eye
Could have persuaded me: now I dare not say,
I have one friend alive; thou wouldst disprove me.
Who should be trusted, when one's own right hand
Is perjured to the bosom? Protheus,
I am sorry, I must never trust thee more,
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest.

SHAKSPEARE.

CHAPTER VI.

It was not that I had forgotten Meta, and the trouble which she might be bringing upon herself, but we were still lovers, Brice and I, and could not but be in a manner absorbed in each other. That is, for I speak for myself, I was absorbed in him—I should be I think until the end. Nobody else could ever be so interesting, could ever awaken in me such quick and passionate sympathy. Not my child, no, she would seek another mate and make me second in her love, second or third perhaps, but Brice was my own mate, my

very own, so long as time should last for us, and to me it seemed incomprehensible that the close tie which bound our spirits together could ever be broken when time should be no more.

The weather had set in exceedingly warm, a comet was expected, people said, and the heat was such as to throw ordinary occupations out of gear. I tried to be very industrious, but it tired me very much, and I resolved to take my baby, with her little nurse, into Kensington Gardens, where I hoped to find shade, and perhaps, a gentle breeze stealing up through the many glades of handsome trees. How well I can remember that afternoon. How hot it was, the very flies and gnats seemed tired of sporting in the sultry air, which was unbroken even by the hope of a thunderstorm. The grass was dried up in the open parts of the gardens, and the nursemaids sat and chatted with other nursemaids in groups,

letting the children play at their feet, or within sight.

I was careful to preserve my baby from the chances of a sunstroke, and having brought her through the shadiest paths I gave my little maid full license to amuse herself and baby as she liked, either by rambling or sitting still. It ended in their wandering off in search of the ducks, keeping within sight, but at a distance. I had seated myself in the cleft of an old and wide spreading tree and had taken out the book I brought with me, but I felt sleepy, that delicious sleepiness which is half thought, half dream; my dreams or my thoughts, were all happy, all full of my husband, and the love he had expressed for me, and I think I must have really slept, for I awoke to the consciousness that there were voices very near me. Some persons talking were on the other side of the tree, walking to and fro in the short bit of heavy shade. The retirement which had attracted me, had

probably attracted them, for the voices were in that earnest converse which does not easily brook interruption. I thought they were passing on and did not rouse myself, when the steps turned back and brought the voices again close to me.

The first sentence which fell upon my ear was in an unfamiliar voice, but the passionate tone of the utterance at once arrested my attention.

"I have sacrificed everything, women always do. You are too cautious and will risk nothing."

The answer did not reach me; it was, I thought, purposely subdued so as to check her excitement, and besides as they reached the end of the bit of shade, the sound became more indistinct. Whatever the answer had been it seemed to have provoked this impulsive woman, whose very voice spoke of feeling, for her answer was indignant.

"I know your new wife has closed your

heart and broken old ties, older ties than hers, ties which you had no right to break."

"You know better, Esther, not even my wife can alter my affection for you; still you must remember that being a married man I must be more cautious."

I was trembling all over; in a moment the words which I had just heard seemed to have altered the very current of my life, for it was Brice who spoke, my husband; there was no mistaking the concentrated reined in passion of his voice. It was so seldom that he expressed his feelings that I could well understand that she might be mollified by his answer.

"I hate caution, women never think of it," was the reply, but the tone was softened, though as it seemed but for a little while.

The next words puzzled me, they were from her.

"Only five hundred, it is all that will be wanted."

The answer was low and distinct, but every word reached me, and seemed to engrave itself on my memory.

"Did I not tell you that I keep a private book, that I may do this without its exciting suspicion. I have told you that it shall be done, and it shall be; but I must take a little time."

The answer came quick and earnest.

"You will not visit this upon me, Brice. You will not be angry with me and withdraw your love from me because you are married?"

I strained my ears to catch the answer, but I could not.

The next words told me that I was not mistaken, it was Miss Butler who spoke.

"You dine at Mrs. Phillimore's, to-night?"

"Yes, if you will promise to be discreet—" the sentence was broken here, but the last could hardly be mistaken, "suspicious last time."

They parted then, he said good night, and without turning to look back went off across the grass with the swiftness of a man who has already wasted valuable time, whilst I could hear that she waited watching him, until presently she turned off in another direction.

I sat on crouching in my hollow of the tree, with my face upon my hands, shutting out the life and light of all the summer beauty about me. What was the summer to me now? it had gone out of my life and left me altogether wretched and desolate.

What would become of me and all my future life? how could I get rid of it, how could I pass away the long years which might intervene between me and death? Every quickened vibration in my frame seemed to say that death would be far off and difficult. It was rather the quickened pulse of excited life which beat such restless disturbance.

Fainting may be a sign of sensibility, but I think not of the highest kind. It is a relief

which I have never experienced, rather a fresh quickening of the feelings as if the nerves had been purposely strung up to bear a higher pitch of agony. It was so with me then, still as I sat my hands pressed against my burning forehead, I was more than wide awake. It seemed at that moment as if my brain could never again be lulled to rest. It is pain like this which makes men old and whitens their hair before the time.

As for fainting, so was my grief too great for tears. I neither wept, nor sighed, nor moaned, I gave no expression to my feelings whatever. An unnatural calm seemed purposely to prevail in order that the internal struggle might be carried on without interruption. Presently I drew out my watch, and looked at the time. I remembered that we were as Miss Butler had reminded my husband, to dine out that day. I had no wish to put aside the engagement; if it had been an ordinary one, it would have served to pass

away a few hours of that dreary waste of future life which already oppressed me like a nightmare, but as it was, I had every reason to wish to see how they two would meet, and what my husband meant by the discretion he had recommended.

I rose then, and went in search of my baby, and we walked home together, still carefully choosing the shady sides of the way.

Going up to my room, I noticed the little finery I had laid out; I would dress early, I was determined, so that I need not be thrown much with Brice. I had arranged his things also, with the carefulness of a valet. I looked now again to see if any thing was wanting lest he might have occasion to ask for it For I had not yet made up my mind as to how I should deal with what seemed the great crisis of my life, and I thought I had a right to time.

The dress I had chosen was of the simplest kind, suited, I thought, to the heat of the

weather, white muslin with a blush rose in my hair. I dressed myself with unusual care, Ophelia when she gathered her flowers had not, I think, lost all thought of making herself attractive to Hamlet.

Looking into my glass, the knowledge came to me for the first time that I was becoming better looking rather than worse. It is so with some people, their faces are but mirrors of their thoughts, and as these gain power and intensity, something which is at least akin to beauty developes itself. I had love, and love had set its stamp upon my face. I saw it now, for I could look upon myself with the critical eye of an ordinary observer.

My cheeks were tinged that evening with a deeper hue than ordinary, and my eyes sparkled; but how ill I felt. It seemed as if a fire had been set alight within me—burning always—but never consuming, as if indeed jealousy had found a bodily presence. I dressed myself completely, threw over me

my white opera cloak, and went to the nursery to sit with baby until it should be time to go. I made the excuse that I wanted a cup of tea—for it was not usual to me to intrude where my servants were taking their meals—and Ann, as she did that night, was in the habit of taking her tea in the nursery.

Presently, long after the time he ought to have been home, Brice came hurrying in, and began calling for me. I sent Betsy down to tell him I was dressed, and that we should be late, and then I heard him—he was rather given to make a noise—shut himself into his room, with a clap of the door, as it were, which almost shook our tiny mansion. I had always liked this habit of my husband, his going up and down stairs like a cannon ball. The decision with which he wiped his shoes, and the noise altogether, which seemed at once to make it evident that the master had come home. I had liked it, because sly men, bent upon evil, learn to creep, to move here and

there without being heard, and I thought that had I been in the last extremity of sickness, Brice's decisive ways would hurt me less than the subtile movements of another. But now, I sipped my tea, vainly trying to quench the raging fire within me.

The cab which had been sent for came presently, and I took my seat in it, while Brice was coming down stairs. He followed me; his curling hair looking, in spite of his haste, to be most daintly arranged.

"You are in a hurry, love," he said; the words crimsoned my face as brightly as if it had been the speech of a stranger, but I answered coldly—

"We are late."

The cab made such a noise, that the coldness of my tone could not, I think, be distinguished, even by so keen an ear as that of my husband, and I made it an excuse for not talking any more. Perhaps my husband was not sorry, for he had hurried home,

and the half-hour of silence was a better preparation for company; besides, had he not a difficult part to play that night. He soon became absorbed, and had, I think, fallen into calculations, before we reached the door of our friend's house, to which I decided at that moment, it would have been far better if we had never gone.

Mrs. Nelson was fond of large dinners, and therefore, we found many guests besides ourselves. I have said that my thoughts had been forced into abnormal activity. It was therefore, a relief to me to be with strangers, and I was more animated than usual; forced out of myself, because I could no longer rest on self.

Once or twice during dinner, I saw Brice look at me, seemingly arresting his own conversation in order to do so. I was talking to the clever man of the party; and the subject under discussion—though an out-of-the-way one—had engaged my attention of late

in my earnest way; for I was given to the habit of thinking subjects out when they came across me, whether they were of use or not. I had a dislike to the feeling of settling my mind into a certain train, and never going off it, to see what interested other people. I was then, as it so happened, in a position to bring out the lion of the evening, in a way which no one else could do—and though I spoke very low—he took the matter in hand in so loud and determined a manner, that I should have been very much ashamed to find myself so prominent at another time. But the evident pleasure which it gave our host and hostess to see the lion brought out, and forced into expressing himself in his idiomatic and lucid manner, prevented my retiring into myself, as I might otherwise have done.

Besides this, roused from my deep despondency, I was feverishly restless. I must do something to pass away the time—to get rid of a little of that long, long interval—which,

like a waste of sandy desert, seemed to stretch before me ; that long interval before I might lay down my burden and go home. Home! to the Great Father, who would surely pity the child whom He had stricken. Perhaps, nothing so clearly shows the trust which human nature has in the Mercy of Heaven, as the feeling which induces us to believe that our sorrow, our poverty, our loss, are in themselves a charm. For often, in putting forward these as our plea, we forget that sorrow, as often as not, means an awakening to a better, holier nature; a higher state of existence, if we would but see it; remembering that the patriarch's visionary ladder, leading up to Heaven, was made of many stages, and that the angels are ever calling to us by their example, to ascend higher and higher still, if only little by little.

At this time I thought it a great thing to get rid of half-an-hour—only half-an-hour—and if that was so hard what should I do

with all the days, and weeks, and years, which might lie before me. Ah! vain—vain anguish—was life then nothing but selfish happiness—selfish! Ah! not so; giving up my happiness, I had to see go with it my husband's honour and truth. The deceit and failure of one who seemed so good, meant far worse than the failure of many men; it meant that he was but a whited sepulchre, with an interior which could not bear the light of day.

We left the table, and Mrs. Nelson drawing me to her in the hall, whispered how delighted she was that I had made myself so charming.

"That article you referred to in the 'Quarterly' is his own. I am so glad you liked and praised it so prettily. You have quite won his heart, I am sure."

Won his heart? I, who could kindle no lasting fire in that of my own husband.

But I bowed my head and smiled, and

looked shy with my blushing face; but what did I care for all the great authors in the world. I had only wanted my husband's love; all other flattery was as nothing.

CHAPTER VII.

O suffering, sad humanity!
O ye afflicted ones, who lie
Steeped to the lips in misery,
Longing, and yet afraid to die,
Patient, though sorely tried!

I pledge you in this cup of grief,
Where floats the fennel's bitter leaf.
The battle of our life is brief,
The alarm — the struggle, — the relief —
Then sleep we side by side.

LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER VII.

I HAD said to myself that flattery was nothing, and yet I think it was worth something after all. It made me look like a happy woman, and looking so no one would suspect the treachery of my husband. Loving him as I did, no failure of his could make me wish that his secrets should be known to others than myself, although I was well aware that every one sees further than the individuals most concerned.

When we entered the drawing-rooms I

scanned them eagerly, but the children were not there.

Mrs. Phillimore drew me to the sofa on which she generally sat, and made me very comfortable with cushions and footstools, but I think that night I would rather have been free of the place of honour. It was too much in the light, and gave me no leisure for the horribly fascinating task of watching my husband.

However, Mrs. Phillimore had adopted me into a friend, and being married does, I think, open one's heart to wider interests, and now brought us both into easier communion with one another.

"Where were the children?" I asked at length.

"Miss Butler," my friend replied, "has protested against so much company, and insisted that lessons must be finished first, but they will be here directly."

I mused over this observation for this in-

sistance on her duties beyond even the requirements of her employer did not, I fancy, quite agree with her character such as I had seen it. Was she as studious in keeping up appearances as my husband then?

Presently there was a little stir, and the elder children made their appearance, followed by Miss Butler. Upon her my attention was centred at once. Curtseying rather to Mrs. Phillimore than to the company she retired aside, but as she did so our eyes met with one quick glance which confused me rather than her. I possessed that thin transparent skin upon which emotion of any kind readily writes itself, and I felt the quick colour of shame mount to my very temples, only to fade away; but she, with her white, but beautiful self-contained face, passed on with what I could fancy a little disdainful air of triumph. She might have said to herself—"How beautiful I am—a very queen in my beauty; how can he compare me with you, you little insignificant

thing—so small—so capable of being overlooked; but me, who could enter the room and not see me, poor governess though I am."

She had well timed her coming I thought; her lessons had probably been a plea for avoiding the awkward interval she would have passed in our company; and she had scarcely been seated before the gentlemen came flocking in.

Would Brice go to her, or would he pretend not to remember her. I wanted to see this, but the lion came up to me, tea cup in hand, and took up our conversation where my leaving the table had broken it. I answered him playfully. I would not again be betrayed into an argument because he would talk so loud; but yet I had not the resolution, though I was so pre-occupied in my thoughts, to say a word, or rather to refrain from trying to keep him by my side. I did not then perceive how it was that Miss Butler reached the piano, and was only aware of the

fact when the tones of a powerful and rich contralto voice swept through the room, hushing it at once to silence. It was rich and powerful, but not sweet, and it did not touch me, or awaken any sympathy in me, though every note was true.

It spoke more of a strong and powerful will, I thought, than of a loving heart—a woman to be feared as much as loved. Ah! it was Brice who was standing by her turning over the leaves. Had he asked her to sing, I wondered. Had he wished to display a power which he probably so well knew that she possessed.

But it was time to go. Brice was more than ready—anxious to get away. I could well understand his anxiety to get rid of a situation which must have been very burdensome to him, particularly, as I perceived, that he was, indeed, a very poor actor. I would have delayed. I did so dread that drive home in the cab alone with him; but I

could not—Brice was well accustomed to have his own way, and he had it now as always.

We went to the cab, the lion escorting me, and I was sorry when he left us, for then we were alone.

Brice passed his arm round my waist, and drew me to him. I was very much embarrassed. I had not yet had time to make up my mind as to how I should deal with our future, so I did not move his arm, but I kept as far from him as I could.

"Where did my little wife learn all she talked of at dinner?" he asked, in a delighted tone.

"I had been reading it last week," I returned, indifferently.

"I am afraid," he said, laughing; it seemed a genuine laugh. How could he, I thought, be so light-hearted. "I am afraid you made a mistake in marrying me—a plain, silent, business man. You should have had a man

of intellect, who could enter into your subjects of thought."

What ought I to have answered? How should I but the night before? Would I not have interlaced my hands about his neck, and have told him that he was all the world to me, and that in the mine of his love lay such untold wealth as left me only to make day by day new discoveries of his worth.

I did not do this. I bit my lip instead, and looked out upon the weary night, and just then a way-side lamp flung its full glare upon my face.

Brice slowly withdrew his arm, and left me to my meditations, and I—no, I had not made my mind up yet. I must have time.

Brice did not say any more until we reached home, and then he handed me out of the cab, with that injured air which lovers know so well how to make tell on one another. My injury, however, was too deep for such expression. I went on into the house,

unheeding, feeling in my own heart a disdain I could not altogether banish from my countenance.

As usual, the servants were gone to bed, and we had to light the candle for ourselves, Brice dismissed the cab, and followed me quickly. Although, if by any chance he had avoided me, I should have been even more miserable than I was; his presence was an embarrassment to me. I had not yet made up my mind as to how I should deal with him or with our life. I still needed time.

This time, as once before, the light when it was kindled showed that there was a letter waiting us. It was not for Brice, but for me. Any interruption to our solitude would have been welcome, but this was in Lucy's ever welcome hand, and I seized upon it as an excuse for not returning the eager questioning glance which Brice gave so full at me—a glance which, had it been sincere, should have meant that his heart cried out to mine

from the great love he bore me for an explanation of my coldness. But my eyes had been opened. I might come to forgive, but never to be blinded and deceived again.

I read my dear Lucy's letter, which was a short one, but evidently written under excitement.

"Come to us to-night, dearest Allie and Brice; we have such strange news to tell you. If you cannot, then be sure to come to-morrow, and prepare yourselves to be very much astonished, and then you will not feel so overwhelmed as we do to-day. Heaven has been very good to us, and I do so hope we shall be humble and grateful.

"Longing for your coming, I am, ever, dear brother and sister,

"Your attached,

"Lucy."

In the midst of the wreck of all my own

hopes, I yet could not be unmindful of any good coming to my old home, and my feelings stirred me for a moment from the remembrance of ourselves. I gave the note to Brice, saying:

"It is too late to go to-night, is it not?"

He did not answer until he had read the note, rather more slowly than I had done.

"Not to-night," he answered; "they will have given us up long ago, but we will go to-morrow evening, or you could go early and I would fetch you."

"I will write a line to say so, and have it posted early," I said. "Do not wait for me; this letter excites me, and I could not sleep—but you have your day's work before you" (varied, I internally added, by appointments in Kensington Gardens and elsewhere).

Perhaps he felt that I had a right to think of my family and to sympathise with them; that, however, he might join with me, it was not possible that he could feel as I did—pos-

sibly he believed some love affair had come to a successful issue, and that after all there was nothing in which he could be deeply interested. Anyway, he took his candlestick, bade me not be long, and, adding that he would not put out the light, left me to myself.

I was very much relieved; I knew how sleepy he always was after his day's work was over, and that though he might fancy he would keep awake, he would soon be in a heavy slumber, and I felt free.

I wrote my note—that was very soon done; I told Lucy I would be there to an early tea. It would avoid our home dinner, which would be something gained.

Having finished my note, I sat down to think—to try to think rather—but oh! how difficult it was! What a mockery it all seemed! false and hollow, such as my life must be henceforth: my white gloves, the rose I had taken from my weary head, my fan and laced pocket handkerchief, my pretty dress

and its simple trimmings—all a mockery in company with a sorrow like to mine.

I tried to sit in judgment on my husband, but I could not, feeling was uppermost and judgment was blinded by it. It seemed so horrible that he should be so false, and yet so fond; and yet if I had been sure that his love was quite gone from me, I think I must have died.

As I clasped my hands in passionate misery my eyes fell upon the bit of gold which adorned my finger. Was there not a charm in it? I—I only was bound to Brice by a hallowed tie, such as this. It must mean something after all, it must give me a power with him which no other woman could possess. Satirical writers have said sometimes that men quench their love in marriage. But is it true—are they not very bad men who write this? Byron, who stands out as the very model of an unfaithful husband, was he ever influenced by anyone as he was by his

wife?—did any other woman ever acquire the power to move or grieve him as she did? I think not. But I am writing now out of the long experience of a life, and looking back with eyes dimmed by pity, I see myself sitting there in my anguish as if I were another; I see the young wife in all her misery, mistrustful of mercy and her own power—which is a true and righteous power, if she can but come to see it—looking into those dim mists of the future, which now I look back upon with clearer eye, reading how much sorrow was due to circumstance, how much to the untempered will, the undisciplined heart, the failing love.

I could not think—for to think was to condemn. To-morrow, I said, I will meet the present, and determine on my life.

I took up my little bits of finery, extinguished the light, and stole upstairs. The candle had burnt down quite low; even then I feared Ann might comment on the waste.

Brice had long been asleep—I stood and looked at him; perhaps my doing so—some dim sense even in his sleep of a living presence near him—disturbed him, for he moved restlessly, and spoke: it was a name which fell from his lips, not mine but hers—Esther—and I shrank back as if he had stabbed me, then creeping to my place by my husband's side (ah! what estrangement can be so cruel as this!) I cried myself to sleep with youths' all passionate tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

How am I changed! my hopes were once like fire!
I loved, and I believed that life was love.
* * * * * * *
I love, but I believe in love no more.
* * * Oh, from sleep
Most vainly must my weary brain implore
Its long lost flattery now: I wake to weep,
And sit through the long day gnawing the core
Of my bitter heart, and, like a miser, keep,
Since none in what I feel take pain or pleasure,
To my own soul its self-consuming treasure.

SHELLEY.

CHAPTER VIII.

I WOKE in the morning with a feeling of great refreshment, until my senses becoming more aroused, there came upon me a remembrance of yesterday—entering like a tide which broke down all before it—and then I laid my head back upon my pillow, shrinking from the light of day.

I was generally up first, but this morning I must have slept heavily, for Brice had already left the room. I did not look at my watch. I did not care about the time. Brice was, I thought, probably quite as glad as myself to

avoid our meeting at breakfast. The kidneys I had ordered for him the day before, in that long, long time ago, before I had found out his treachery, tasted better without the savour of my presence, I apprehended, than they would have done with it. Besides, I was really ill, my head was aching; and that tormenting fire within, like the very visible presence of mental anguish, overpowered me. Meta had spoken of our tranquil existence. How little she, or any one else, ever dreamed of the passionate reality, which sooner or later, falls into most lives; which had so suddenly fallen into mine.

With a start! with a pathetic feeling like remorse, I heard Brice's step in the garden; and the gate swing behind him. He was gone, then: the first day in my married life had dawned, in which I had not looked upon his face. I buried my head in the pillow.

The door opened very softly, and Ann peeped in, breakfast-tray in hand. It was a

very unusual thing for me to take my breakfast in bed. I had not done so since the first month after my baby was born. Little women like me are generally strong and active, but my strength had gone from me to-day like a dream.

"Master has been up once to see if you was awake," said Ann; making her comments, I feel sure, on my swollen eyelids, "and he told me to tell you he would be round at your papa's as early as he could, to meet you this evening."

She began arranging my things a little, without seeming to look at me.

"How is baby?" I asked, languidly.

"As well as well can be," said Ann. "She's got a treat in store for you. This very morning, she's been and toddled from me to her papa, and he is so delighted, he caught her up in his arms, and fairly smothered her with kisses."

"Baby walk!" Yesterday this news would

have caused quite an excitement in me. To-day, I felt so old, as if I had seen fifty babies walk in my time, and I only stirred my tea.

Ann looked furtively at me. Her intelligence having failed to rouse me, she thought I must be very bad indeed.

"You are ill ma'am," she said, "shall I go for Dr. Robertson?"

"Oh, no; I am only tired. I am going to mamma presently."

Grim as she was, she was very tender with me this morning. Did her pity mean, my jealous fancy asked, that she saw the truth, and knew that my husband's fancy was waning for me?

I got up presently, wondering to find how weak I was; so that I was obliged to rest several times before I had finished dressing. I told Ann this when I came down, as an excuse for not putting away my things. I felt in myself that I could not touch them. It did not matter to me whether my muslin were

ever fit to wear again or not. I did not feel to care whether I ever went out again.

I had my baby brought down to me, and her wonderful achievement exhibited, and this roused me from my self for a little while. My baby was, at least, in my eyes, a lovely child. She had her father's large honest eyes. Honest! did I say. Oh! looking at his picture in my child, I thought that morning, how deceptive a thing physiognomy is.

But it was necessary to think, and I was so tired and weary, and I let baby go to her morning slumbers. She had been up early, and out before our breakfast. Brice had always praised my house-keeping and my management, particularly of baby; not to me, but to mamma or Lucy—but then, I had been such a happy wife—and to be happy and good is so easy. How, I wondered that morning, should I be miserable and good. How should I ever care again to manage and

rule with vigour. I who, oh! Heavens, if I could but die and take my baby with me.

But I had to sum up my future, to sit in judgment on my husband, to draw out of its confusion all the sad evidence against him, which yesterday I had heard from his own mouth. To do myself justice I think no other evidence would have been conclusive to me.

Let me remember; what was it? He was to advance five hundred pounds to some one for some reason or other. For this purpose he had withdrawn his accounts from my full knowledge by keeping a private book. That the necessity for this had altogether arisen since our first meeting Miss Butler, I could not believe, besides even then I had suspected a previous acquaintance. A correspondence of some kind or other I had proved myself with my own eyes.

Remembering the scene which I had overheard, I could not, in justice—nay, in

mercy—say that I recognised in Brice that tone of passion which would represent a love bearing him headlong from every restraint. Therefore I was forced back upon the supposition that there had once been an engagement between them. Ah! why then had they not married?

Meta had said all men were weak and foolish, and perhaps upon seeing her again he had been unable to resist the feelings he had formerly entertained, and which he now disguised to himself under the name of a simple friendship.

The accusation my heart brought against him rested half on his own evidence, half on supposition; and this last I told myself—told myself in the fresh morning light, when the sunshine was playing through the brilliant jasmine—left a hope that he might still love me, might perhaps love me best, when the impulse of his better nature stirred within him.

To one of such a craving, jealous, and impassioned nature as myself this was little enough; but going back through the length of years and sitting in judgment on myself now, I think I can, without any leaning from the truth, say that in this crisis of our lives I loved him better than I loved myself, and that I was willing to sacrifice myself, if I only saw how.

In speaking of sacrifice, I had no intention of vanishing from my husband's house with or without my child, and leaving him free to marry this girl, whom perhaps he preferred to me, by making him suppose me dead and buried, by putting up a gravestone to myself in Pierre la Chaise, or pretending to take a place for myself in a shipwrecked vessel. Thanks to my early training, I never for a moment wavered towards such an undisciplined sin as this, or called it sacrifice. I knew that not only must I do right, but that so must Brice. So fully as I loved, so willing

as I might be to set myself aside, yet if by the lifting of a hand I could have purchased for him an immunity by which he might have followed his own undisciplined will, I would not have done it. He must be brought to fight his way back to life, and this by such self-denial as would be implied by his doing his duty to me. To such poor commonplace had my love dream descended, to submit to be cared for for duty sake.

Then how? would it be well to tell him what I had heard and seen; to give vent to the burning indignation which like a volcano surged up within me; to heap upon his head the reproaches he so well deserved; to wither him with the contempt I could not fail to feel; to show him how he had fallen short —oh! how short—of my ideal; and then, when boiling passion had exhausted itself, to offer to help him to carry out what poor, colourless, hopeless duty remained to him

as best I could, now that our dream was altogether broken.

I did not do this; I decided that for such an outburst the time was already past, and that he was not the kind of man with whom it would answer. Besides, although there was much which puzzled me, there was more which I decided it would be impossible for him either to explain or deny.

I felt that with a man of his secretive character the exposure of his secret would so revolt him that he would hate me for unmasking him. Besides which, I was afraid of disturbing him; I was afraid of disturbing that dignity of character which I knew now to be hollow and ready to crumble; but which I had not the courage to pull down, knowing that my hand alone perhaps had the power to do so.

And who but himself had given me this power to injure him. No, I could not do it.

In silence I would bear with him, trying to do my duty by him, if I could; but giving no utterance to the deep love which had hitherto found its innocent expression in a hundred simple ways. This I owed to my own dignity; but I would do no more so soon at least as the fearful wound which my peace had received should be salved over, ever so little.

Ah, me! but it was weary work, and I had loved my husband so very dearly.

CHAPTER IX.

Myr. (sola). Why do I love this man? My country's daughters
Love none but heroes

* * * * * *

I love him;
And that's the heaviest link of the long chain—
To love whom we esteem not. Be it so:
The hour is coming when he'll need all love,
And find none.

* * * * * *

Could I save him,
I should not love him better, but myself.

BYRON.

CHAPTER IX.

How well I remember that afternoon. There had been a few showers in the course of the morning, and although the pavements were now quite dry, there was a sense of relief and refreshment in the air. I had dressed myself very neatly; but when I looked in my glass before starting, I could not help feeling —regarding myself now with a judgment too sad for vanity—that I was not such a woman as a man need have tired of so soon—so soon. I did not know then that every year which

had riveted our love would have made the loss of it the harder to bear.

I had had many hours of sharp suffering; but I think they were not written on my face. I was learning to dissemble, if such pardonable concealment may be called by so hard a word, and I could put on smiles. Had I not practised them on the philosophic lion of the night before? And when upon my road I looked at myself in shop windows, I felt satisfied that even my mother's loving eyes would detect nothing amiss in me—except perhaps, that heretofore, I had been so pleased to talk of Brice, and now I felt that I should be wise to speak of him as little as possible. Other wives I found were glad to talk of their husbands, even to complain of them; but mine was such a grievous wrong that it could not be spoken of at all.

I had to take two omnibuses, and it was not always pleasant to me to go so far alone; but I had learned already that you may go a

long way in London without being interrupted, if you only assume an air of business, which, as much as anything, repels interference.

In order to gather up my thoughts, I walked the last half mile. I, who had so grief-occupied a mind, must try for a time, at least, to be at leisure from myself, in order that I might be ready to hear the good news which I was on my way to learn. I could not bring my mind to bear upon it, however much as I tried in these few minutes to set myself aside.

When I came up to the dear old cottage, where we had learned so to discipline ourselves, I began to remember them, and to forget myself. It was like a sudden relief from some sharp agony to be able to do so for the shortest time. The place was so peaceful, so lowly. I knew that it was shortly to be given up; but I felt that everyone would be the better for having lived here,

and I loved it. Here I had believed in Brice, here he had sought me, and at least, for a brief period—precious as a possession in all one's after life—I had been happy. Some one, I forget who, says that "the heaviest sting of misery is the remembrance of lost happiness." I never could agree with that. I treasure up such memories, and, as it were, repossess myself of them.

It was such a peaceful picture which presented itself to me as I entered the house, without knocking, and lifting the latch myself. My dear mother was knitting in her arm chair—I think it was a sock for Brice—and this was I knew the only fancy work she permitted herself. Dear mamma, her eyes were beginning to fail, and it was one of Brice's little acts of kindness to make her presents of woollen yarn, pretending to get it from some peculiar wholesale house, on terms which, to believe him, were rather remunerative to himself than otherwise.

Lucy was engaged in making a frilled box cover of the very prettiest cheap chintz I had ever seen—all rose-buds and green leaves—and one could fancy at a glance how it would brighten up her bed-room, so poor and shabby as it would be, even at Notting Hill, in comparison with the luxuries of our former home.

They both laid aside their work, and rose in a kind of flutter to meet me.

"Do not say a word until she has her bonnet off," said mamma. "Poor child, she is tired."

And Lucy took me upstairs.

"Dear Lettie," I said, kissing her again when we were alone. "Is it any special good news of your own that you have to tell?"

My words kindled her cheeks with sudden flame, and brought the old look of distress to her eyes, which I had thought had now worn out of them for good, but she answered gently, and with on tone of annoyance—

"No, nothing to me, more than to all; but I promised to tell you only with mamma, at whatever time you came. Brice is coming, of course."

"Yes, he will get here as early as he can," I answered, as confidently as if I mistrusted no meetings in Kensington Gardens; but I thought—I wonder which is worst, to see one's lover change or one's husband. Would I rather be myself or Lucy. Ah! in spite of all the misery, I do not think I could quite have said the word which, if it could have been said, should have parted me from Brice for ever in the past as in the future.

I put aside my bonnet and smoothed my hair, and tried as I did so to work myself up to a state of expectancy, which should make me relish any news I might have to hear.

Then Lucy, smiling with her sweet smile which had so little of self in it, led me down, I feeling quite penitent for having distressed her.

Then when I came down I had to drink a glass of orange wine and water, and eat some biscuits, for mamma said I was faint after my walk.

"Now, mamma, I am quite ready," I said.

Mamma looked at me curiously through her spectacles. Was I, indeed, ready for good news.

"How is baby?" she asked, quietly.

"Quite well; she walked to-day."

This news was received with congratulations and respect, but mamma looked still more puzzled.

"And Brice?" she asked.

"Quite well," I answered, suppressing a rising in my throat; "but this is not your news, mamma dear."

"Tell her, Lucy," said mamma; "and you, Alice do not be too much surprised, remembering who it is that setteth up one and putteth down another."

"Stay, Lucy," I said, stopping her. "Does Meta know?"

"She knows it by this time, or will soon. She wrote to say she could not come."

There was a passing shadow on both dear faces, but Lucy seemed to put it away from her.

"We told you," she said, "when we saw you last, that Mr. Mills was dead."

Mr. Mills was a cousin of papa's, a rich Bristol merchant, with whom I personally had never had any communication.

I answered—

"Yes," and waited for Lucy to go on. I remembered with a little compunction that I might have put black ribbons in my muslin dress the night before, but it had seemed like arrogating something to claim relationship with the rich Bristol merchant, whom I had never seen.

But now I noticed that both Lucy and mamma were in black, although they wore old, convenient dresses which I knew well.

"Yesterday," continued Lucy, slowly as if

she were administering chloroform, and was watching the effect, "papa had a letter from his solicitor."

I still waited, and Lucy continued slowly, and I thought in a humble abashed tone. Perhaps at that moment she remembered that the poverty which had but proved my lover had found hers wanting.

"He has left papa all he had."

"Oh! I am so glad," I exclaimed. "Oh, dear mamma, I am so glad for you and him."

And yielding to the excitement of the moment, and I am so thankful for it, forgetting myself, I moved the few steps necessary to reach her, and kneeling by her side, embraced her with all my heart.

It was so papa found me, and that I was sobbing hysterically did not seem to surprise him, for he took me in his arms and kissed me with all his old affection.

All their care seemed for me—their blame that they had not prepared me enough—had

told me too suddenly. The more they pitied the more I became agitated. After such wretchedness their dear love was too much for me.

I was still sobbing upon my father's breast when I became sensible of an addition to our party, and I felt myself transferred to Brice's stronger arms. He held me to him, soothing me as a tender mother might her infant child, whispering softly to me to be calm and quiet, and putting more love into the tender pressure of his arms than I could bear.

He was so strong, and I so small and fragile —ah! he seemed a fitting support for me. I knew how gratified mamma would be to see my husband so kind to me. But, as in a moment, my sobbing ceased, or hushed as that of a frightened child, and shrinking from his arms, as if their embrace had been the coil of a slimy serpent, I said that I was only foolish, and so glad. I was shaking all over

still, and so released myself, and sat down clinging to mamma, and trying hard to keep down the shivering which I could not suppress. But, at least, I was quiet; and the little maid, grown quite skilful, now brought in the tea; and its coming seemed a relief. Brice knew all, I saw very well, and he looked very happy, but never for a moment seemed to lose his dignity and self-respect. They were all calm but myself, and I recovered myself, to all seeming. They spoke gravely of the new change of fortune; gravely and respectfully.

Mr. Mills had had, it seemed, no nearer relative than my father, and when the time to part with his wealth came, he left it to him. Papa accepted it, as knowing what an uncertain possession it was, and how little after all, it could be part of himself, as something which he had lost and found, and in the course of time could hold but a little while. Even now, when I think of it, it is with ten-

derness I remember the humility with which the new wealth was accepted. I said with humility, but it was more, it was with reverence; as if a holy thing had been entrusted to their care, a talent from the Great Master placed in their keeping.

After tea, dear Lucy took up her chintz box cover, with the pretty rose-buds. The act touched me.

"You will not need that now, Lucy dear."

"Perhaps not," she answered, with her sweet smile; "perhaps I may keep it as a remembrance in my room. It was such a joy when I bought it yesterday morning, that I cannot look upon it as anything else now. Besides, it is healthier for us to keep steadily at work, for it keeps off excitement, so I am finishing my box cover, and mamma is going to finish her sock. Here, mamma, is your knitting."

Mamma took her work obediently, and was soon busy with her stitches; and I fancied

that Lucy had a purpose in her occupation. She had heard, perhaps, of how men had gone mad over successful lottery tickets; that is, really mad, though not deemed fit inhabitants of lunatic asylums. She had heard, perhaps, the sad story of the hard-worked, highly-esteemed, city curate, who, after thirty years of labour, is made head of the parish, where he had lived so long; whose sudden success turned his poor head, and left him to die in a mad house.

Such stories were probably floating in dear Lucy's brain, and kept her so quiet, and mamma so quiet too. She thought too, perhaps, of how the sudden accession of wealth may make men ridiculous too, if not mad; for Mr. Mill's wealth was immense, and it was enough pleasure for to-night to know that they were relieved from all sordid care. More, I think, it would have been unwise to think of so soon.

"What shall we do for this boy?" said my

father; always in his thoughts so generous; "who took my child when she was poor, and helped her father to struggle when he was almost imbecile with trouble." He laid his hand fondly on Brice's shoulder, and he turning round, dared to look into my father's face, with such a look of affection—how could he dare to do it I thought—and as he laid his own hand upon the delicate but withered hand which lay unemployed, I think they would have made a good picture.

"You know," he said, "that you have given me your full confidence. What could you give better?"

"Aye!" said my father heartily; "and all the world shall know what my full confidence means."

It seemed, that family group, to be such a pleasant sight to look upon, and to remember; so homely, so much repose, when there might have been so much excitement. So much timidity, so much holy fear, that even

now I think of it with pleasure. But I, surely my thoughts were alien from the blessed peace that reigned there. I whispered to Lucy, and then preferred my petition to Brice.

"Might I not stay all night and sleep with Lucy?"

"Are you so ill," he asked, turning upon me with that intelligence in his eyes, which seemed to read the secrets of mine.

"I am very tired," I said, wearily, and looking away from him.

"I can get a cab," he said.

"It shakes me so; but I will come if you wish it, of course." I rose; but really felt so weak that I sank heavily down again.

"She had better stay; we will take great care of her," said mamma, not knowing what she said, "and I will bring her home to-morrow. Papa will bring you word how she is."

I had not the least intention to get up

an illness; but I did not contradict the appearance of it. That would have called for more virtue than I possessed.

Brice stood smoothing his hat round with his elbow, as men often do when they are undecided. I had hardly ever seen him look so handsome as he did, standing there in his perplexity. I think even in that moment I would have laid my head on the block, and done it cheerfully, for his sake; but I shrank with a bitter and dreadful shrinking, from laying down my head upon the pillow by his side.

CHAPTER X.

A COMPLAINT.

There is a change—and I am poor
Your love hath been, not long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did—not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count!
Blessed was I then all bliss above!
Now, for this consecrated fount
Of murm'ring, sparkling, living love
What have I? shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love—it may be deep—
I trust it is—and never dry:
What matter? if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER X.

Brice went away at last; but though he looked as if I might have done so, I did not follow him to the gate to bid him good-night. He had said something about Lucy's flowers, and how they scented the air; but I would not take the hint. I knew that he was plain and matter-of-fact, and would not resent my remaining behind for any true purpose; but he was still my lover, or had assumed as much, as well as my husband, and I knew well that he detected that it was not illness

so much as unwillingness, which prevented my return.

But I said to myself, or rather my shrinking pride dictated to me, that he had no right to scrutinize my feelings, his own being so full of a darkness, into which I hesitated to look. So, not being able to get me out, he wished me good night, kissing me. But I gave no return kiss, and let him go out into the night, wounded and alone, on this first night of my knowledge of the great accession of wealth which had come into my family.

When he had left me, I became sensible that somehow it did not seem natural to them to have me there; but I wore this strangeness down, being determined to remove any misapprehensions from mamma's mind, and accepting her remedy of a dose of sal volatile, I soon recovered my spirits, to all seeming, and remained talking with papa for a long time.

He was very quiet. I never saw a man so

quiet under such good fortune, and I questioned him of it.

"You see," he said, "my dear, I used to depend upon my wealth a little; and though there were many who, when we fell, were ready to say that we had carried our prosperity well, I think the Great Giver could not have been altogether satisfied; and so, now that it has come back in double, and perhaps treble measure, I feel afraid lest I may not do any better than I did before." Then after a pause he said, "What shall I do for Brice? Shall I withdraw him from business?"

A thrill of pain passed through me. I had not, in the confusion of the evening, thought of any difference to ourselves, and I remembered that rich, Brice's temptations would be increased a thousandfold. As the rich know, and sometimes take so little into account the temptations of the poor, so I think we are apt to forget that the rich have also temptations, which those who are limited in their means,

for good or evil, by the stern requirements of poverty can scarcely understand. I would, if I could, have spoken out, have said, "leave us poor." But I felt how unlikely I was to prevail with a man of generous impulses like my father, and how the world would misjudge him, if, after Brice's marrying me poor he should fail to give me a dowry equal to that of his other children.

I seemed then to be gravely considering the point, and when I spoke, papa listened with attention.

"I know that in whatever you do, you will be good and kind," I said, "but I think it would be no kindness to take from Brice the employment in which he is successful and happy. He is made for a man of business, and will perhaps be a second Mr. Mills, and I daresay Mr. Mills had more pleasure in earning the money than in spending it."

"I will consult with him then," said papa. "I will offer to resign my part, for I am

determined at my time of life not to risk the loss of a second fortune, and I shall certainly withdraw from business. I can then feed him with what capital he requires, or settle upon you as he may like best."

"Not too much," said I, earnestly, putting my hand in his. "You know how to use money, we are so young to have too much."

"You must learn to be rich, my dear. You have been born and bred to it, and you have no right to shrink from the trouble. Brice is made to be wealthy, see how fortunate he is, he is like a kite in a good wind, he has only not gone up for want of more string. Perhaps you fear this new money may turn my head?"

"Oh, no papa! You are too good, too tranquil—"

"But," continued papa, scarcely heeding my interruption, "it is not to me half the ble ssin that the possession of such a son-in-law is—the certainty of my darling's happiness.

Why, to see his face, one would have thought we were hurting my little girl to-night, mamma and Lucy and I."

Here he rubbed his hands together and laughed, with such pure enjoyment that I could not but resolve more and more to hold my horrible secret in my own hands.

"Mamma and I," he repeated, laughing again, "were hurting his little wife, so he must come and interfere and take her out of my arms. I wonder he leaves her with us to-night."

It was true, Brice was really more to him than Mr. Mills' money. Could I break his dream, and tell him Brice was false and hollow as other men were, and not worth his love, for he was making me most truly miserable. Ah! no, no.

I went up to bed—to my old bed where I had been so happy dreaming of my future life, as all young maidens dream of marriage as of a life without a flaw. I thought of how

Brice had gone home alone, and how our baby would come in in the morning and not find me. In the weary conflict of my feelings, I had almost forgotten baby until now.

Lucy had put on her box cover to smarten up the room for me. I thought I should never see it without remembering the beautiful simplicity of her feelings. How thoughtful she was of me that night, and I needed thoughtfulness, for I think in my own mind, I doubted whether I was really sane. What did I care for all the wealth in the world if that wealth only came to plunge my husband further into temptation, and Meta had told me such dreadful things, and with her trying laugh, had once said—"Be thankful that your husband is poor," and now he whom poverty had not kept strong was going to be rich.

"Are you very sleepy?" said Lucy, when I had been silent with my miserable thoughts a little while.

"Oh, no," I answered.

"Then I must tell you how I envy you, dear; though envy is not the word, for I know how much better you are than me."

"Why do you envy me, dear?" I asked.

"Ah! cannot you tell? Brice was true to you, I thought I had got over it, but I fear now I have not. I am almost afraid that if he asked me now I should accept him in spite of all."

I had no need to ask who he meant.

"Would you?" I said, "and would it be so wrong?"

"I do not know, I think it would be losing all self respect."

"Yet if he had committed some other fault," I said, "perhaps you would forgive it?"

"Perhaps," she said, "oh! I hope I shall not be tried, I hope we shall never see him again. If he had only been like Brice, true as steel, he would have had occasion to rejoice now."

"There is a cross in every lot," I whispered, gently soothing her.

"But never in yours, never to come into yours, Alice, I firmly trust."

"You will meet with some better man," I said.

"With many better, but none that I shall love like him; but no matter, this is all vain and foolish, and only comes out of our new wealth, you see; good night, dear, and the sweetest slumbers," and so she seemed to fall asleep almost as she spoke these—her last sweet loving words.

Oh, that miserable night!—thinking—thinking of my married life, and of my innocent, happy girlhood, in which, perhaps, I had more indulgence than was altogether good for me; wishing that I might have kept Brice always as my lover, and had never married him to find him false.

The next morning seemed to me to be

stranger even than the night: the cottage was so small, the arrangements so humble, and the meal so simple, that it was difficult to conceive how they would ever take up the burden of wealth again.

"Yes, we have been happy here," mamma said. "You were married from here, my dear, which makes the place almost precious to us; but I daresay I shall soon fall into my old ways again—but let us hope

'With a noble purpose,
And with a nobler aim.'"

"And what shall I tell Brice about you?" said papa, with a twinkle in his eye.

"That I am quite well and going home directly," I said.

Papa looked disappointed; perhaps he thought I did not appreciate my husband as much as I ought to do.

I went home after breakfast, taking an

affectionate leave of mamma and Lucy, and very humbly taking the road as I had come in the two omnibuses. Perhaps now I should be keeping my own carriage, but I cared nothing for it all.

CHAPTER XI.

Zanga. You now are too much ruffled to think clearly
Since bliss and horror, life and death hang on it,
Go to your chamber, there maturely weigh
Each circumstance; consider, above all,
That it is jealousy's peculiar nature
To swell small things to great, nay out of nought
To conjure much, and then to lose its reason
Amid the hideous phantoms it has form'd.

EDWARD YOUNG.

CHAPTER XI.

When I reached my own door, it was not Ann but my little nurse who came to open it.

"Where is Ann?" I asked.

"With baby," said she, with a little confusion.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked, wildly, and sprang up the stairs.

Imagine my feelings; my beautiful darling whom I had left so well yesterday was lying insensible in Ann's lap. She had had a convulsive fit I found, and was recovering

from it now. Ann had fortunately had much experience in sickness, and had placed my child in a warm bath, and had sponged her dear head with cold water, and had been invaluable in bringing back my darling to life. There, about the room, were still all the apparatuses of sicknesss, striking upon my fancy like an evil conscience. Yesterday night I had deserted my post, and now—

"Had she been ill when the master left?" I asked, jealously.

"No; only very sleepy," said Ann, "and they had thought she was going to sleep, when her face had become distorted."

"Oh, awful!" my little Betsy confirmed.

I threw aside my bonnet and gloves, and took my baby in my arms. Yesterday I had thought myself the most unhappy of mortals, to-day I saw how much I still had to be thankful for.

I sent Betsy for my good, kind doctor, and Ann and I watched over baby until he came.

He reassured me, while he pitied my alarm and commended my watchfulness, and he left me, recommending the utmost care, but with care apprehending no danger.

Our agitation had subsided by night; baby, though exhausted, was like herself, and slept soundly through the afternoon. But I told Ann that I should watch with her that night, and that I would have a bed made up in the spare room, and take her there, so that the master should not be disturbed.

Had I a single motive in this?—I think not; and yet may I not be excused?

When I heard Brice's hand upon the latch of the gate, I went gravely out to meet him, and told him of what had happened, and how penitent I felt for not having returned the night before. He was very much concerned; and I felt that whatever might come between us, he had an equal right in our child, and that here was a bond of sympathy which must not be disturbed.

The event of the day, and my very reasonable anxiety, covered easily enough any change in my manner; but when at night, as I was taking my candle to go to bed, I told him of the arrangement I had made for the night: he was startled, and said, a little sternly:

"Why not bring her to our room?"

"I do not like you to be disturbed—you have your work to do," I said, casting down my eyes; and as we were not accustomed to part at night, I left the room as usual, without taking any further leave of him.

I saw that he was much hurt, but I thought he deserved it, and my heart was hardened towards him.

Now if baby had known how to behave on this emergency she would have kept up a moderate show of illness; but that very night the obstinate tooth which had caused her such a shocking struggle for life came through, and in the morning she was waking me up

with her little hands trying to elongate my mouth on both sides, whilst her own face was dimpled about with smiles. It is true that she was pale; but she was such a bright spirited baby that I think she would have cast off any illness, if she could.

I came down to breakfast, bringing her with me, partly because I loved her so, and still felt such a shuddering remembrance of yesterday, and partly because I dreaded being alone with my husband, and gladly welcomed even so small a third party to our conference.

Brice came into the room gravely, and gravely he kissed both me and our baby—his darling as well as mine, and silently he took her in his arms—she was always so glad to go to him—and carried her to the window that he might admire the new tooth which had caused her so much trouble—perhaps, if the truth were known, more trouble to him than to me; but in case of

any difference, we are so apt to forget that the person with whom we are vexed has feelings as well as ourselves.

He sat down to his breakfast presently, still keeping baby on his knee, and attending to her in every way. And to see our silent breakfast table that morning, no one, I think could have told that a great fortune had come into the family.

He left in the same reserved manner. Not that this was unusual to him; but another morning if I had seen him so forgetful of me, I should have stolen my hand into his, have lifted my face to be kissed, or perhaps, in passing, I should gently have smoothed the curls of his brown hair. I did not do anything of the kind, for I was deeply resentful, although I had controlled myself to silence; but when he was gone, I began to think that it would have been better if I had spoken out. We were, I could see, veering away from each other by almost imperceptible degrees,

leaving each other at an angle to which we might never return again.

Baby went on getting so well during the day that it seemed almost a farce the doctor's calling, and I ought to have been so happy when he told me that there was no further room for uneasiness. I think I should have liked him to have added that she needed watching by a good nurse at night, and then —oh, my husband! had it come to that.

Nursing my innocent child through that long morning I think my heart would have softened to my husband had not a circumstance intervened which hardened me still more.

I had laid baby in her little cot, and had watched her quiet slumbers until I deemed it quite safe to leave her to the care of her young nurse. As I drew myself away there came a thought of the grand nursery I might soon be able to have, and of how little comfort the new wealth was likely to bring with

it. For the present my absence, my miseries, and the sickness seemed to have upset things a little, and I wandered over the house partly because I was so restless, putting little things here and there into place, as no one but a mistress or very experienced servant knows how. So wandering I came to my husband's dressing-room. It was still as he had left it; this tiny cupboard of a room, where there was just space to turn round and no more, and upon the floor, as if it had drifted by the wind from the table to the floor beneath it, lay a letter.

It was open and unfolded, and Ann, if she had come in before me must have seen it—nay, for all I knew had already done so. I stooped and raised it. Now I had so rigidly carried out my resolution not to tidy his things, or open his drawers, or even fold away his clothes, lest I might come upon some witness against him, that it had almost amounted to neglect. But now, without stop-

ping to consider, and in a kind of blind fury, I read what was there written. Thus ran the letter:—

"DEAREST, DEAREST BRICE,

"Have pity on one who hardly tempted has fallen in your esteem, who has—I will not deny it—sinned.

"You with your stoical nature cannot tell how I have suffered. You are so strong, I so pitiably weak; and yet the blame is no more mine than yours.

"Last night I walked over Westminster Bridge, and I understood how tempting the river is to those who are as miserable as I am. I long to see you trusting that we may come to some arrangement, not for my happiness, that is past, but at least for some hope in the future. I am willing to abide by your directions, either to remain in London or to leave England, as you may think best, only let us meet and talk the matter over.

"I shall be by the Duke of Wellington's statue, on the first seat, about the hour of your return to-morrow afternoon. Do not fail to come, and to give yourself time to hear everything. I know you will be good and kind as you always have been. I can scarcely leave off thinking of more and more words to move you, but if I go on I can say only again and again—have pity on your affectionate and wretched

"ESTHER."

I stood reading this with starting eyeballs. If there had been any pity growing up in my heart, out of the grief I had felt over our child, it died away and left me as hard and cold as before. There were many reasons why this letter moved me, if it could be possible more even than the words I had heard in Kensington Gardens. It seemed to appeal to an intimacy which even I his wife had never reached. However wounded, could

I have dared to write so to him. Then too it seemed to speak of two natures—the man who needed thus to be adjured was not my husband as I knew him, Brice to my knowledge had ever been tender, sympathetic, and compassionate. It is true he had confessed his difficulty to understand the trials which beset me in the land of shadows, but this letter dealt with no shadowy sorrows, it was the outcry of a breaking passionate heart which even I could pity, and which it must be impossible for Brice to resist. But to what did all this point? What dreadful temptations surrounded him? She would submit to his dictation to remain in London or to leave England. Alone, did she mean, or with him, Brice would do nothing to forfeit the world's esteem, I seemed to know that by instinct. His good name was very dear to him. What matter that he did not deserve it, he was yet one who could not lightly set society at de-

fiance. I did not therefore fear that he would leave me in fact. But of what value was his love any longer to me. He must go his own way, I mine, and then perhaps very soon I might die and leave him free to do his own unkind wicked will.

Was there anything to plead for Brice? I thought not. His very virtues and his high character stood out against him, for they made his failing to be only a failing of a darker dye than that of other men. It was not that Brice professed much; but was not his very life a profession of the highest principles. His daily carefulness to offend neither in word nor deed, his compassion for the miserable, confessed in acts, rather than words, his tenderness over the weak and sinful, which amounted almost to blindness; his reverence for my parents, and the beautiful friendship that existed between himself and my father, and his high unquestioned honour

as a merchant. All these things which I had so gloried in, were but as finger posts pointing at him, and ever pointing *hypocrite*.

What should I do with him ? How should I, putting him out of my heart, yet do my duty by him. I was no self-deceiver, and I told myself that there was no way to do this —that love only was the power by which I could battle—but oh! oh! oh! would that I could die, I said.

It would be so possible to forgive him if we were living apart, and he were a common enemy; but the daily life, that was the worst, the breakfasts and dinners, the long evenings; it was dreadful this, too dreadful to bear.

There is nothing like this horrible disunion; it is as if soul and body were at strife. There is no forgetting the foe who eats at the same board, and lies down with you on the same bed. It is this which rouses the awful passions we read about, and find it so impossible to realise; this fearful power of being, as it

were, at war with one's self. I am not excusing, or attempting to palliate, but only speaking the bare truth. Marriage, which is so beautiful, so holy, so humane and tender, yet leads us into whirlwinds and storms of temptations, such as no other life can even recognise.

Why should I not tell Brice what I had seen and read? Ah! why, indeed. I had not the courage to unmask him, I said; but I think truly, that there was another reason. Real or simulated, his personal dignity was so great, that I could not have dared to approach him with those accusations which were in my heart. My tongue would have failed to utter the thoughts which yet reigned rampant in my inner life, like some wild disorder, which had altogether gained the upper hand of all my health of mind. I was afraid of him, with that religious awe, which I told myself only a good man had a right to inspire.

These were the feelings with which I had to meet my husband; but I had no need to dread him. He did not seem to notice my avoidance of him, or if he did so, he was as bent as myself on concealing some feeling away from me. He looked worn and anxious, pale and weary, and when he had learned that his child was better, he retired within himself, and seemed, for all that the outer world might know of it, to be solving some deep problem in his mind.

I had burnt his letter; what else could I do with it? and if he asked me for it, why then—but he never mentioned it, and probably thought that he himself had destroyed it. If he had been wary enough to have kept his own secrets, to have blinded me to the end, I thought how grateful I should have been; but then, after all, it would have been trusting an untruth, which sooner or later, as all untruths do, must break down.

Brice kept his own counsel, as I did, and

perhaps, who knows, looking into the future, he found his life as difficult to face as I did mine; but as reticent as myself, he gave no sign of what was passing in his mind; neither did I, by word or look, attempt to question or comfort him. What was his unhappiness to me? nothing in which I could sympathise. My anger was very hot within me, and my heart very sore and bitter.

CHAPTER XII.

She knew,
For quickly comes such knowledge, that his heart
Was darkened with her shadow, and she saw
That he was wretched; but she saw not all.
He rose, and with a cold and gentle grasp
He took her hand: a moment o'er his face
A tablet of unutterable thoughts
Was traced, and then it faded, as it came;
He dropped the hand he held, and with slow steps,
Retired.

BYRON.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next afternoon Meta came down. I had expected her. Instead of being glad, she was positively fretful at the new fortune.

"Why did it not happen before?" she said; "I might then have married a nobleman."

"Is there not still a chance?" I asked trying to smile.

"No, how can there be? I am engaged to Mr. Masterman."

"It is still not too late," I said, "to draw back."

"It is. A girl that has had a broken off engagement is done for — almost tabooed. Besides, I do not wish to break it off. Of course, now I love him, and it is too late; but I might not, if I had known in time."

"If you had only listened to papa at first."

"Oh, as for you, you are like the three crows in the cornfield, with no better consolation when a neighbour is shot than, 'I told you so.' Much help that gives."

Meta was, I saw, determined to throw the blame of her future on some one, and yet no one could have taken her own wilful way more surely than she had done.

"It will be only Lucy who will profit by this change," she said pettishly. "Only to think of Mr. Mills never telling."

"It was better as it was," I said. "We went through our trial more bravely, because we depended on no one but ourselves."

"Yes, but if I had known," she said pettishly, pulling at her bonnet strings, "and

now George will give me less time than ever, and is wild to get married. I suppose it must be soon."

"The longer you take for consideration the better," I urged.

"Nonsense! When a thing is to be, it is as well now as ten years hence."

"At least you can now go home and wait until papa removes to a new house," I said. "Under present circumstances it would not be well to be married from Mrs. M'Phinn's."

"That is the very reason for hurry," said wilful Meta; and I have always observed that, when people begin by taking their own way, there is a kind of fascination in it which leads them on more and more. "Can you tell me that at any time George Masterman would be cordially received by papa or mamma? No, and that would make my wedding truly disagreeable; and therefore, I shall hurry it forward. Will you come to it, if I ask you?"

"Oh, Meta; do not ask me, if your marriage is to make you unhappy."

"Ah! you," she said bitterly, "the use there would be in waiting; but at all events, Brice will not oppose papa's giving me a dowry."

"He has never spoken on the subject, and I cannot tell whether he will at all interfere with papa in the management of his money, but I should think it extremely improbable; and besides, papa, whatever he may think, is too liberal and indulgent to be likely to do anything to hurt you."

"What a pity that you married when you did, and how you did, you might have looked so much higher. Only think, to have married a man in trade!" Meta said this with as much disgust as if she had been born an aristocrate.

"Papa is in trade," I said, "and so was Mr. Mills."

But I made no urgent defence of my mar-

riage. There was a flaw in it, though Meta had not laid her hand upon it.

"Ah! I see," she said mockingly, "that you think with me, though you are too proud to say so, and much in the right of it too; but it was a good thing for Brice, I can tell him."

I let her observations pass. I had, in truth, little heart to discuss my most unfortunate marriage, as I termed it; though even then I was very sure that, if I had not married Brice, I would not have married any one. I did not know, in truth, how wilful she had grown, or how incautious of the happiness of others, and I let her go, without making any further answer to her allusions to my own marriage; to that inner circle of my life, with which none but ourselves had to do.

Her last observation, as she kissed me would however have provoked me if I had had any spirit left in me.

"We have certainly made a mess of it,

you and I carrying out the old maxim, 'That it is better to be born lucky than rich.' Oh! that we were both like Lucy; you, I see, feel it as deeply as I do, though you will not confess it."

Then she stepped into the carriage with an access of stateliness, which, though a little affected, became her well.

Like Lucy, I thought, and Lucy had said she envied me and my faithful husband. How little we know of each other's trials, how little we realize the truth, that we are all the representatives of a class, and that there is, as I had reminded Lucy "a cross in every lot," none the less real, because, from the careless eyes of the world it is far out of sight.

Then I went back to the endless refrain of my thoughts.

I had let Brice go forth to his temptation unaided by me. I would not have done it if he had been any other man; if he had been weak and passionate, but so he had never

seemed to me. He was strong; strength was the great element of his character.

I would have saved him from throwing himself recklessly away, if I had thought that possible; but I knew, and it was some poor comfort to me to know it, that he would be as careful of his good name as I could be of it; that self-contained, self-respecting, he would be cautious, even in his folly.

And yet, how hotly his folly must have combated with his wisdom, before he had yielded to an assignation in the Kensington Gardens, where any chance friend might have seen him, as I did.

Now, he would be rich. There would be no limit, no check, upon his will; but he would be rich through me, and perhaps it would make him a little grateful to me. I waited, watching for him all day for my love —any woman knows that I speak the truth— was as deep as ever, though I knew it not. I

scarcely made a pretence of employment, besides nursing my baby. I knew he would not come before a certain time, and yet I stood watching for him full half-an-hour before he could appear. He came at last, when dinner was about to be served, and he went direct to his dressing room, which was very unusual in him; and we did not meet until he took his seat opposite me at table.

Then I saw him; stern he was, and my heart sank within me. He would presently seek an explanation of my changed demeanor. He was not a man to be trifled with, and I should have to answer him. I sat in silence conning this difficulty, and I let my dinner go by almost untouched.

When it was over, and he had been upstairs to see baby; he came down and drew out the books, bringing accounts out of his little black book, and we sat down, as mechanically as if we had indeed been clerk and master. I fear

my interest in the books was gone, but I could do my duty, even when it ceased to be a pleasure ; and I did it now.

Once or twice I could see his eyes raised as if they would meet mine ; but I would not look him in the face. What had he and I to do with such confidence henceforth? I had looked on my husband as all but perfect. I could not tolerate his shortcomings now, and yet I would do my duty by him, if I could— as if duty and love could ever really separate.

When the books were done, and we worked very hard at them, for it was a kind of extra night, he closed them with a sigh, and then with a little effort he said—

"I called on Meta on my way home to congratulate her on her new fortune."

I changed colour. It was Meta then who had been complicating matters between us.

"It seems," he went on, seeing that I had said something common-place in answer, "as if money must be a curse."

I did not answer. It stabbed me like a sword to hear him moralizing.

"Meta tells me," he said slowly "that—you—" he paused—"are as repentant as she is of the engagements you have formed in your poverty, and that I should hold myself grateful for having married a rich girl by so lucky an accident."

"And she, being a woman," I cried, indignantly, "you could not chastise her for such an insult."

He smiled a patient, weary smile.

"I was more earnest," he said, "to know the truth than to seek for revenge. Meta is Meta, and no one can hold her tongue in check."

He put out his hand and touched mine supplicatingly, and the action was doubly touching as coming from one who was habitually master.

"Do you repent? Would you rather that I had not married you?"

Could I doubt it? I thought then that he loved me; but—but why love Esther Butler? Had he not told her he would never withdraw his love from her? The words started up before my eyes as if they were written in letters of fire.

"These are idle questions," I replied coldly. "We are married, and hard as the trial may be we must do our duty by each other. As I will do my duty by you, Brice, so must you try to do your duty by me."

I laid a heavy emphasis on the "try," as if I knew how difficult his part must be.

He flung my hand from him with a passionate exclamation, and left the room and the house.

I waited for him a long time. In his wrath he was very dear to me, though I felt he had no right to be angry. Had my words called up his evil conscience, and was he afraid of being questioned? He need not so have feared, for I had no such intention.

At last I went up to bed. Baby being so well, I had no further pretext for absenting myself, and I went to our own room.

But Brice did not return, and hour after hour went on increasing my anxiety, almost to horror, when at last he came up slowly, and my heart warmed to him when I heard how weary his step was, though I seemed to be asleep. But when, presently, I heard him wind up his watch, and listen to it, as if so small a matter could still engage his attention, I hardened again, and being weary past all weariness, I went off really to sleep without speaking. As I did so, I thought of the criminals chained to each other against their will, and wondered whether use brought with it hate or love. Any way I dreamed that I and Brice were so chained, and that he was impatiently tearing at the rivets, as if his hand had the possible power to break a chain whose links galled him to the quick.

Waking up with this dream, I leant upon

my elbow, and looked at his sleeping face. Oh, how worn it was! Then, for the first time I understood the phase of feeling which has led writers to make their heroines run away and pretend to die. "Not so, however," I said to myself. "You and I, Brice must wear our chain. There is no happiness, though you may think it, beyond the pale of duty."

CHAPTER XIII.

Let there be
No further strife nor enmity
Between us twain; we both have erred!
Too rash in act, too wroth in word.
From the beginning have we stood,
In fierce, defiant attitude,
Each thoughtless of the other's right,
And each reliant on his might

LONGFELLOW'S GOLDEN LEGEND.

CHAPTER XIII.

I CANNOT paint to myself the weeks that followed. Even now they seem like an ugly dream — having that real dream of the chained criminals for the beginning and foundation. I could not tell how Brice spent that walk in the summer night, and with what mental struggles he had acquired that worn look, which seemed to have grown so familiar with his countenance. What might have been his moral conflict I could only guess and speculate upon. Whether he had succeeded in wresting his soul from its cherished sin,

or whether his awakened conscience only scourged and fought perpetually with his unyielding will. These questions I could not answer. I only knew that he was changed—with a change as great as my own—and that there was a trouble upon him which, though we both governed ourselves so well, I could feel was as heavy to him as my own.

Dating from that day, and as if we had been guided by the same will, we settled down into a different manner of treating each other. There was a carefulness of giving offence, which was as painful as if daily life were undertaken in the trammels of a court dress—we were so exactly polite and so determinedly deferential to each other's needs, that we never seemed to trench upon each other's confidence in the least. We went to church together morning and evening with the same punctuality on Sundays, but it might be noticed that I took more pains with my dresses; not that they were any handsomer, but

they seemed always to prevent my taking his proffered arm—until at last the arm was not proffered. But when the Communion Sunday came, as it did twice during this weary time, I had a headache on both occasions; and whether Brice staid or not to the holy service, I did not learn, although dinner was always later with reference to it.

Whatever our conflict was, however sore and hard to bear, I yet thought sometimes that it would have been better if we could have borne it together; but we made no attempt to do so: it was not in Brice's silent, self-contained nature to seek sympathy, and I was too deeply resentful to attempt it. I saw that he left home earlier, without lingering at all over his breakfast, and that the portions of Scripture which he chose for reading at our daily prayers were of a sorrowful cast. I could perceive that he returned unwillingly home, and that his usually firm step dragged as it reached the gar-

den gate; he looked very ill, and so in truth did I, and I said to myself in reference to it, "the chain which is binding us is galling us both to death."

But, meanwhile, in other things changes more perceptible were making themselves felt: the dear little cottage at Hayside was given up, and my father had removed to a handsome house near Hyde Park upon the Kensington side—far within his means—but as he said in reference to it, he had more to do with his money than he once had. And it was soon most delightful to see how earnestly he set to work to spend the rest of his time in his Master's service. Specially did he give his attention to buying up plots of ground, using them in building dwellings for the poor wherever they were most wanting; indeed, I think he worked harder in spending his money than he ever did in earning it, for he had never been a craving man—princely always. Meta was married—had married a

month after our conversation upon the new fortune. The marriage had been wilfully hurried forward; papa had been liberal in money arrangements, but had not been present at the marriage, and we did not go either, which Meta chose afterwards to resent, almost ignoring the liberality which had been shewn her. She visited a great deal, and in a very gay and dissipated set, Mr. Masterman being a fast and greedy man, covetous of all pleasure, and so that it pleased him, unscrupulous in acquiring it. It seemed strange to me sometimes to remember how we three girls had once sat so contentedly chatting together over our work, no shade of difference stealing in between us then; and how the time, which had used us all so severely, had separated Meta from us. I had reproached her for what she had told to Brice, but she had laughed it off, and excused herself, and in short Meta was Meta, and there was no use in trying to check her.

Lucy was again—and how glad I was to see it, I rejoice to think even now—restored to more than her old luxuries, she had her saddle horse, besides her place by mamma's side in the elegant carriage, which swept its daily course around the park and found its appropriate place by the Serpentine, where mamma was fond of watching the tiny craft upon the water. They had their lofty handsome drawing-room, overlooking the elms of the park, and Lucy, the one daughter at home, reigned it royally. But where I liked best to picture her was by papa's side, carrying light and cheerfulness wherever he went, and standing with him in squalid lanes, where perhaps he had bought, or meant to buy, some site for a new and healthier dwelling than that which he had a pleasure in destroying.

Papa had been very liberal with us; he had made the offer of giving to Brice absolutely, or of settling a sum upon me, and was,

I think, a little disappointed and puzzled when I stated as delicately as I could that I should prefer the latter arrangement. A mercantile man, I said, should have a resource, and though papa said Brice's acknowledged prudence made him an example, I still persisted.

In truth I did not believe in Brice as papa did, and I remembered the five hundred which he agreed with Miss Butler to secretly withdraw from the business, and really in concern for him I made this arrangement.

I saw, directly it was done, that it was a galling one to him, and that by his refusal to have anything to do with the interest or to invest it in the business, papa had given up his share, and Brice promised to take loans if he needed them; but it would appear that no such opportunities of extending the business arose, for he made no such application.

One thing had, if anything could do so,

increased the settled uneasiness I felt. Brice at this time engaged a cashier, and withdrew the books from home, and I had no opportunity of knowing how things went on. Perhaps he had seen that my pleasure in the work was gone, or perhaps he wished to lengthen the chain that bound us. However that may be, it took away an interest from me at a time when my heart was sorely in need of any interest to occupy it.

I still loved my husband as devotedly as ever; I think I loved him more. I craved for his presence, but when he came the old indignation burnt up stronger in my heart.

I was now overwhelmed with money, which lay idle at my bankers, for Brice had empowered me to open an independent account. I did not care to spend money, and I did not feel good enough to give it away.

How could I deem that such alms would be acceptable to Him whose stringent order echoed ever in my ears, "First be reconciled

to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

So my money lay idle; I neither drew it for fine clothes for myself, nor my baby, nor did I do any good with it. But all this time I said to myself that I would do my duty if I could see what my duty was. And yet slowly and surely and almost by imperceptible degrees we seemed to be drifting away from each other, more and more.

Once Brice offered to make a change in our establishment, and to take a new house wherever I might choose; but I put this off. I could not bear in that humour to leave our little cottage where we had been so happy, and so, though papa rallied me upon it again and again, things went on as they were.

One evening we were at tea, and I thought I would try to help my husband to make himself a better man, and would attempt to lead up to confidence between us, and I said to him—

"I do not mind keeping the books again if—"

"Nobody wishes you to trouble yourself," he returned, quickly.

"I was going to say," I went on, colouring, "that I should enjoy doing so if I could be as much in your confidence as I was at one time."

"That is impossible," he said, shortly.

Our laboured politeness having no foundation in real good will was giving way to a childish testiness, of which I was heartily ashamed whenever I thought upon it; but I overcame the temptation to rejoin, and said, with something of my old earnestness—

"Could you not do away with your private book, and draw upon my account for any sums you might need to spend privately."

He said, "No, I could not," almost angrily, and presently went out.

He was much in the habit of going out of

an evening now. I think that deeply as I loved him our society was becoming mutually intolerable. But when he was gone out and I was left to my own thoughts, then, indeed, I was truly miserable, and I sat thinking, or throwing myself wildly on my knees I would so remain crying for light, sending up raving prayers to Heaven, which, so disordered were they by human passion, good angels must have wept over e'er they reached the mercy seat, if such burning tears, such passionate cries, such earnestly troubled, but still such earthly prayers, ever could reach.

And then, when his step came up the garden path, I would gather myself up, rise from my knees, or from the floor, where I had laid my very forehead in the dust, and smoothing back my hair, and quieting myself all at once, would become hardened to him, as to one who having played recklessly with my happiness, had yet the assurance to wear the stern, calm demeanour of an injured man.

"You are late," I said, haughtily one night, and I had it in my heart, and almost on my lips to reproach him, and fling my rival's name in his face, and to dare his wrath to the utmost; anything better than that intolerable calm which existed between us.

"Yes," he replied, slowly and sorrowfully. "I fear I do it purposely. I sometimes wish I knew how to free you from my presence altogether."

I was amazed; this throwing back of the cause of estrangement upon me, appeared so ungenerous; but without a full explanation, how could I explain myself, if his own conscience did not convict him. I turned haughtily away; and he taking up his candle lighted it, and went on to bed.

If I had spoken out, even then, I might have saved myself a pain which lingers yet.

CHAPTER XIV.

One with her bright and burning cheek,
All passion, tremulous and weak,
A woman in her woman's sphere
Of joy and grief, of hope and fear.
The other, whose mild tenderness
Seemed as less made to share than bless.
One to whom human joy was such
That her heart feared to trust too much,
While her wan brow seemed as it meant
To soften rapture to content;—
To whom all earth's delight was food
For high and holy gratitude.

LANDON.

CHAPTER XIV.

One day about this time, I went, as I often did, as indeed, I could not help doing, to see mamma; though her affectionate scrutiny was very trying to me. Mamma was out; but Lucy was at home, and I found her in her own peculiar morning-room. To see her now, sitting with every evidence of wealth about her, it was difficult to realise the fact of her industrious life at the cottage. She seemed to me, who had come from my simple home, to be surrounded by gorgeous colours, —the rosy curtains with their handsome

border swept gracefully to the floor, with its covering of exquisite green carpet, and the beautifully worked ottomans and couches—for Lucy had taken to the patronage of female art—made her room in itself a picture. But it was herself which attracted me most—the dreamy expression, half of sorrow, half of satisfaction, which spread itself over her pale face, which had become so delicate and refined, seemed to attract me at once. She held a letter in the hand which dropped down upon her lap.

"You look very luxurious," I said, smiling at her.

"Do I? Well, I think I do; and I suppose there is a subtle charm in all this wealth to some men's minds."

In answer, I glanced at the letter.

"Yes," she said, showing me the writing, which was Mr. Norton's, "it has cost me so much, that I could not go out with papa, though he has found a court more delight-

fully horrible than anything he discovered before. But I thought it due to Mr. Norton to think the subject well out. We met," Lucy went on, "at Lady Mavor's, the night before last, and we waltzed together. I did not think I could have done it, but I did. I felt in such a charitable humour that I tried to wipe out any public impression that he had used me ill. But this is another thing."

She looked down at the letter with a certain tenderness, which made me say—

"It is an offer of marriage then?"

"Yes."

"And you will accept him?"

"No, I think not. I bear him no malice; but my love dream is over. I shall never marry; and I have found a work to do. I shall help papa in all his schemes, and I shall be happy."

"Are you sure?" I said very earnestly. "He was wrong, very wrong, I know; but he is a proud man, and will never give you a second opportunity of refusing him."

Lucy smiled sadly.

"Be very certain I do not want to so wound him as to have to do what I have to do now a second time. But I did want this. It has removed the trouble I had at feeling that I had made a mistake. He confesses his error. He says he meant to have asked me to be his wife that day when I expected him to do so. He humbles himself now. He confesses that his besetting sin is ultra refinement, and that poverty, until now, had always seemed like vulgarity to him. I shall not marry him; but I think next to papa and Brice I like him better than any other man, and I will, if possible, make him my friend, and, perhaps, in time cure him of his fault."

I could not help honouring her resolve, and I told her so. I said, and I spoke from my heart, that "a single life had many noble advantages; that all self devotion was possible to it, and that Mr. Norton had proved himself unworthy of her."

But she answered quietly—

"He might be a much worse man, and yet be worthy of me; and I do not think I could refuse him on that ground. But we women want one thing from those who say they love us—that their love shall be perfect, if not themselves; and his failed in the time when my heart might have broken under the loss. But he shall be a better friend than he has been a lover. See here what I have found for you—such an exquisite worker, in a poor girl, whose mother is dying of consumption."

Lucy drew out a blue cashmere baby's dress, beautifully embroidered with white beads.

"This is for baby," she said, as she slipped the letter into the pretty pocket of her apron. "I was going to send it to you to-night."

I kissed her white cheek, which told of past emotion, far greater than she cared to confess, and praised the dress.

"I find so many people to be interested

in," she said, with a half sigh and a whole smile, "and really our money is making us so happy. I never knew it could buy so much happiness before. In spite of all, however, I have an anxiety, and I fear, though you do not speak of it, it is yours too. Brice looks very unwell. Our best and dearest of possessions is Brice, and his pale face causes us many a thought."

"If they should ever find him out," I reflected, with a shudder.

"The summer has tried him," I said; "but he never complains."

"He always tells me he is only tired," said Lucy; "but he ought to have no anxiety now, and yet he looks anxious. Perhaps he misses papa at the office."

"I dare say he does," I said evasively.

"Then you think there is nothing the matter."

"Nothing," I said.

Lucy looked at me, but said nothing more,

although I saw that she was not satisfied. But her exquisite tact prevented her from pushing her scrutiny any further.

She had said enough—if I had anything to say—to show how readily she would sympathise, if we needed sympathy; but it was impossible for her to continue to question me. And indeed she had said enough to awaken my fears. Was Brice indeed looking so ill, and had my jealousy blinded me to the fact?

That same evening, when he came home self-contained—silent, as usual, but pale and worn, as I could not but see, I felt very sorry. Of course I had set up in my own mind the theory that he did not care for me any more, even refusing to yield the concession that I had once made that he loved me the best of the two—loved me with his better nature—his conscience—his honour; although some secret weakness, for which I would not have given him credit, kept him in the meshes of some old entanglement. I had,

indeed, long given up this concession, and taking it for granted that he saw that I suspected him, I supposed that his coldness arose from his anger at my being so near finding out his real nature.

Yet, strong in the intention of doing my duty—if anywhere my duty could be found for me—I asked him that day at dinner if he was feeling unwell, as mamma was anxious about him. I fear I laid a stress on mamma's anxiety, as if I did not share it.

He lifted his eyes then, and met mine with a wistful glance which I could not but shrink from, feeling somehow, that perhaps, in the great mysteries which wrap about human souls and their temptations, that look came from a nature above my own.

"I do not know that I am unwell," he answered, quietly, when my eyes had shrank away from his glance; "certainly, nothing worth troubling yourself about. Have you seen dear Lucy to-day?"

He so seldom used affectionate epithets, that his words bore now a greater significance.

I answered that I had.

"What a noble girl she is," he said, regretfully. "I do not know another like her."

It was high praise, but I did not grudge it to Lucy.

"You often look in then," I said, a little irrelevently I must confess.

"Yes, every day, going or returning. I do not know how I should get on without it. They are so kind to me, and always so glad to see me."

I thought his lip quivered; certainly his voice shook, but I thought, hardening myself still, "Ah! but if they knew you as I do; two or three words of mine only, and you would fall from your pedestal, my husband."

"I think," he went on, some internal emotion moving him, I thought, rather than my attention, "that Lucy grows nobler every day."

"She told you then of what had happened to-day?"

"She did."

"And you approved?"

"How could I fail to do so."

"You think she could not have forgiven him?"

"Forgiven him—yes, but not have married him; he acted like a dastardly hound; but if I mistake not, she will pull him up to a higher standard; if not, she is free of a bad bargain."

"You think little mercy should be shown in love?"

"All mercy to true love," said my husband, with emphasis; "but then it must be true."

"Mr. Norton's love was true, perhaps, but weak," I said; "and Meta says all men are weak."

My mention of Meta was unfortunate, for it closed my husband's unwonted confidence,

and shut up his unusual prodigality of words, as if she had been a door, and he had bolted it.

And I said to myself—

"Who was he that he should talk of true love?"

And so if any chance wave brought us near to each other, we drifted away again still further than before.

CHAPTER XV.

I had one only wish, to be
Left to my grief's monotony.
There is a calm which is not peace,
Like that when ocean's tempers cease;
When worn out with the storm, the sea
Sleeps in her dark tranquillity,
As dreading that the lightest stir,
Would bring again the winds on her.
I felt as if I could not brook
A sound, a breath, a voice, a look.

LANDON.

CHAPTER XV.

The next morning Brice really looked so tired, that I could see that his coming day's work was an effort to him. He was longer in dressing than usual, though in this particular, as in all others, he always showed a careful self-respect. When he came down, he only sat at his breakfast, but did not eat anything, and he seemed sleepy and heavy, and when roused, a little confused. I urged him to remain at home. He looked at me in answer with the same wistful look as on the night before, but said immediately that it was impossible.

I could see his eyes wandering attentively round the little room, as if he were taking in the objects about him with peculiar attention; and when baby was brought in he pressed her to his bosom with eagerness, but almost immediately after made an excuse for sending her away.

I thought in my own mind, hardening myself still, that if he could have borne my company for a whole day he would have remained at home.

The glorious summer had waned now into an early autumn almost like winter. We had let the golden hours go by unvalued, spending them in a darkness and disunion which already seemed to have brought a winter into my heart, making me feel old in the very spring time of my youth.

A fire burnt in the grate, and Brice drew near it, and leant down, warming his hands. I wondered at him, for he generally defied the changes of temperature, and when in the old

days of the past winter, he had so carefully wrapped my furs about me, he had ever seemed to have no regard for himself.

As he stooped over the grate shivering, I could see that easily enough—I could not help thinking how little his marriage had done for him. If he had had a fault in the old times, it was that he was so strong that he never needed sympathy or pity, and perhaps his strength of body had helped his strength of mind, and both had repelled the idea of his needing the support of others. Being moved out of myself by the sight of the change which had come to him, I was foolish enough to express it.

"To see you now," I said, my voice taking a harshness from my thoughts, "one would think I had done you a great wrong in marrying you."

"Heaven knows how great!" he said, almost beneath his breath.

"I think," I said, after a pause, still re-

straining myself, "you need change of air. Lucy is right, you really look ill, and we had better go for a little holiday, you looked fagged to death."

"Do I? Perhaps I may take a change soon."

He sighed as he said this, not at all like a man thinking of a holiday.

"Could we not go somewhere from Saturday until Monday?"

"I fear I cannot get away, but you might go and take baby. I think it would be very wise, and that reminds me your mamma bade me tell you she was going to take Lucy to Brighton to-day. You might go with them."

"No," I replied; "I should only care for it on your account, and going alone answers no purpose."

He seemed still too tired to urge the point, and went for his hat and his light overcoat.

"Good-bye, dear," he said, looking in at the door.

It was the first time for many weeks that he had so addressed me. It moved me a little, and I replied—

"Get home as early as you can."

He said—

"Very well," and went away.

As he reached the gate he staggered, or I only thought so, for steadying himself much as a drunken man does, he went on faster, and was soon beyond the turn of the road.

Then I returned to nurse my wretchedness, and to go mechanically through my day's arrangements. But I could not put from me the remembrance of his altered manner.

The miserable hours of the day had gone well forward when Mrs. Phillimore's carriage and ponies came tramping up to the door. She came in beautifully dressed—all fluffy, like a bird of Paradise; but her face did not bear its usual calmsereity; not that she was much disturbed, only as a sheltered inland lake might feel the storm which would set the rivers flowing and the sea roaring.

"My dear," she said, "I am so worried, and I come to you for advice. Mr. Phillimore says I must do something."

They were now in their own furnished house, which they had taken for a term, being of too wandering a disposition to settle down altogether; and I could perceive that the great point of grievance was that she was drawn out of her constant state of equilibrium, and forced into action by the arguments of her husband.

"What is the matter?" I asked, with real feeling, for it was a relief to me to turn from my own sorrows in order that I might sympathise with those of others.

"Miss Butler," she said, and the words fell on my startled ear, "left me last night all in haste; she said that her mother needed her, and that it would be impossible for her to return."

"Do you doubt the reason?" I asked, trying to suppress the eagerness of my question.

"I do somehow; she was always so secre-

tive, and governesses will make any excuse when they want to leave in a hurry, and though you may think me uncharitable, dear, which in this case I sincerely hope I am, for the poor girl's sake, yet the news must have come to her by a letter, which was written in the same beautiful handwriting I showed you that fête day; do you remember?"

Did I not remember, too—too well!

"What a dear, impressionable creature you are," she said to me; "you colour as if you could help it. But now, dear, do tell me what I am to do."

"Do," I repeated, mechanically; it seemed to me as if her question applied to the wretched plot of which I only was cognizant and I said in sudden alarm, which the kind creature I felt sure attributed to my anxiety for her, "you would not follow her, you would not run the chance of taking any illness, perhaps?"

"Oh! dear no," she said quite easily; "be-

sides, poor girl, if she comes to me for a character I shall not care to know too much. I dislike making a fuss and keeping girls out of situations, and I can but say what she told me, if I am asked; but I do mistrust correspondences with gentlemen."

I thought to myself that this was why so many inefficient persons got employment, and were admitted into the confidence of families. It was probably in the same careless way that Miss Butler had been handed over to Mrs. Phillimore; but I was in no humour to take up the subject on general grounds. I was in this too deeply and personally interested.

"What is your difficulty then?" I asked, relieved as to the chances of her pursuing her discoveries from any curiosity of her own.

"Why to supply myself instantly with another governess," said Mrs. Phillimore, probably thinking me a little dull. "Mr. Phillimore says I must look out, the children

cannot be left to servants, and I suppose they cannot."

Here, in evident perplexity, she smoothed her swan's down muff.

I did not know of a governess, and I told her so. I think at that moment I hated all governesses, good, bad, or indifferent.

Who were they with their slim figures and dark eyes that they should come in between me and my happiness?

I mentioned, however, an institution which Lucy patronised, and in which she was deeply interested. I told her that Lucy was gone to Brighton that day, or I could have promised her help; but I thought the mention of her name would procure her all the real interest she required. She thanked me, sighed, and wished her mamma were not in Scotland, and gave a word or two of regret to Miss Butler, who had, it seemed, up to the moment of her leaving, pleased her well.

"I think," she said, with the complacent air of

a spoiled child, " Mr. Phillimore might have found me a governess if he had liked ; but I suppose I must not complain, he does not force me to do so very much after all, poor man."

Then we parted, she laughingly asking me when I meant to cease to be a hermit, living in my little house, telling me there was such a bijon to let scarcely a stone's throw from our own door. I knew it well, and had looked at it often, but what did I care for fine houses.

CHAPTER XVI.

But now a better life began.
I felt the agony decrease
By slow degrees, then wholly cease,
Ending in perfect rest and peace!
It was not apathy, nor dulness,
That weighed and pressed upon my brain,
But the same passion I had given
To earth before, now turned to heaven
With all its overflowing fulness.

LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was with an accession of wretchedness that I went down to my little dining-room, where I could be secure of being alone, for no visitor would be shewn there, and I had visitors in these days—some few of our old acquaintance, who, for mamma's sake, found me out,—but no one else came that afternoon. It was very cold, and a desolate kind of sleet, which had not the heartiness of snow, set in towards the latter end of the afternoon, and this gave me a holiday from the kind of necessity I had imposed upon myself to go

out every day. I feared my brain would cloud over, so great was the burden of my daily anxiety and distress, and I knew that fresh air was the best remedy for mental infirmity. If I should shut out from myself the blessing of sanity, what a curse I should bring upon myself ! I knew that, and I tried my best to prevent my mind from resting too much upon one topic, which I had read was the fruitful source of infirmity of brain.

That afternoon, however, all my resolutions gave way, and with a brooding melancholy which I could not control, I allowed myself to reflect upon the dreariness which had fallen into my married life.

Miss Butler had left her situation, and I think I was dealing in no exaggerations when I reflected that Brice's manner had that morning been unusually strange. How had he pressed baby to his heart!—how had he reproached me as he never before had done !—how had he taken with his eyes, as it might

be, an inventory of the room which, in his poverty, he had denied himself to furnish!

Then the thought came across me for the first time—Oh! merciful Heaven! could it be that he was about to leave his home, his cold wife, his child—oh! but he did love her! —was that his meaning, when he said that he might take a change soon? Did he mean to free me from his presence for ever?—everything seemed to confirm it. In his utmost folly I could not remove the impression from myself that he would be careful of me. Strange—but such is the perversity of human love, which believes in doubt and doubts in belief.

I believed that he could think of leaving me; and yet I could not separate from myself the notion that in doing so his first thought would be of me.

Had he not so arranged that the money which papa had given us should be invested in my name, never, so far as human proba-

bility went leaving me the possibility of want? Had he not opened an account for me and carefully instructed me in the drawing of checks, and told me twice over that if I had occasion for money there would be no need to consult him?

Poor fellow! he had gone upon the rocks then, and I had stretched out no hand to help him. I had seen his unhappiness, his struggle possibly between right and wrong, and I had helped the wrong indeed, not the right. It was true no harsh or bitter words of mine stood up against me, written as such words must be in such moments in letters of fire; but on the other hand, what had I not left undone.

When I believed he still loved me; and when in my favour, there still stood his conscience, and his honour, and the sacred bond, which men respect while they break—had I then thrown myself upon his love, had I reproached him openly and honestly, he might

have repented, and I might have forgiven. "Go and tell him his fault:" how had I regarded that? Trying to do well, but doing it in my own way, had I not drifted away further and further from the right?

Was it too late? Could I yet repair the injury. I resolved within myself that I would do so. Should Brice return—and was not Ann even now laying the cloth and placing his knife and fork—then this very night I would come to an understanding with him. Ah! how I despised myself in that moment; how little value I placed upon my own earthly happiness, compared to his immortal soul, which seemed even now to balance between safety and utter ruin. My Brice—my husband—my lover—in a past which could never be wiped out. I would save him even yet; for his sake I would humble myself to the dust, extinguishing the fiery jealousy which burnt in every vein.

Time went on. Baby, who had been play-

ing on the floor, and babbling in her infantine language of papa, went off to bed, and Ann, who was not in the best of tempers, looked in rather angrily to announce that the potatoes would be spoiled, and the fish done to rags. We had nice little dainty dinners in those days—dinners which, day by day, reminded me of that "stalled ox" spoken of in the Book of Proverbs.

I had always been mightily afraid of Ann's temper; but to-day it made no impression upon me. I told her it could not be helped; she must do the best she could to have a proper dinner for her master when he returned, and so, having dismissed her, I sat on weary, fasting and faint.

Ah! I knew now—knew it perhaps for the first time—that Brice at his weakest and his worst was still dearer than all the world beside. Ah! dear mother, you know you loved your husband better than you did me, forgive me if I set mine before even you,

as in the darkness and desolation of my thoughts I wait still, and wait and watch. At last I tell Ann to take away the cloth, and bring me some tea. I have not closed the shutters, neither have I had the candles lighted. I am watching always for a step which does not come, which, perchance, may never again sound upon the gravel path leading up to our door.

And now I fall into curious speculations. If he does not come, shall I remain on in this house, watching for him always? or shall I leave it and all memories of him? No, no; I cannot let him go into that outer darkness of sin. I must follow him; humble myself even to the very dust; but I must bring him back. Why had I not thought of this before, when the task was so much easier to me?

Our house lay off the road, facing down the avenue of handsome houses, which made ours look so small and picturesque that no

one could have grudged it its place there, and straining my eyes, I watched the road. The handsome houses had long closed in for the evening, when I caught sight of a figure coming towards our house. I sprang towards the door, and went out, but only in time to meet—not Brice, but the postman, with a letter from him. That was something. I tore it open, and read:—

My dear Wife,

Unexpected business takes me out of town to-day. I hope to be with you to-morrow, or, if prevented, will write.

Yours,

Brice.

In spite of all my better resolutions I was deeply offended by this letter—heartless, as I designated it. I rang the bell, informed Ann that her master would not be home for a few days, and told her to close the house for the night. Then I went up to bed and

cried through the first watches of the night, until youth and health prevailed, and I sank into a heavy slumber, from which I woke in the morning to find rushing upon me the full remembrance of the day before, and getting up I knelt down in my lonely chamber, and prayed that I might rise from my knees a better and more consistent woman.

Looking into my mirror afterwards, my attention was arrested at once. A change had come over my features. The brightness of my eyes was quenched indeed, but the light which came from them, subdued as it was, seemed, even to me looking upon my own reflection, to be of a holier kind, and I thought, if I had been asked to read my own face with the eyes of a stranger, I should have said that it belonged to one who had lost some hold of earth to gain an insight into heaven.

How strange the house seemed without Brice's presence. Even baby's merriment

seemed a mockery. But I had gained something in that weary night and by that early morning prayer, and I carried out my resolution. I determined for once, if not for always, that I would break down the cruel barrier of reserve that we had raised between us. I would tell Brice all my mind.

I brought out my desk, and I wrote a long impassioned letter: I told him all that I had seen and heard—his letters to Miss Butler even to the last, which Mrs. Phillimore had mentioned to me ; I told him of his meeting with her in the gardens, adding that I would have mentioned this long before had I deemed an explanation even possible, but that as he stood before me condemned, I had been all unwilling to see one so dear humiliated before me. I saw now that I had been wrong, that my arguments—nay, my entreaties might have aided him to resist a temptation with which his own conscience had probably struggled in vain. "Have mercy on yourself," I con-

cluded, "and believe me, who have come to this knowledge out of much weary thought, and through long and passionate failure—that hard as it may be for you to make your happiness with me, yet that there is no better resource. However deeply we may regret the tie which binds us, yet we must so find our happiness, or no way else on earth. Believe me, Brice, I will make your chain as light as may be, but I cannot let you go; though to do so, I would make any sacrifice which would not involve you or myself in sin, but since there is no such way, I pray you by your present honour and by your future safety to accept the inevitable."

I folded my letter, and went out myself to post it.

An indescribable lightness filled my heart —I had at last humbled myself, and tried to do right, and I said to myself that next Sunday no headache would keep me from church. I had forgiven Brice. I had given up all

hope of earthly happiness, and henceforth I would be as true a martyr as ever suffered a cruel death. My trial had been cruel, but being content henceforth to sacrifice myself utterly, I should find a peace with which the world would have nothing to do.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lew. There's nothing in this world can make me joy:
Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale,
Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man;
And bitter shame hath spoiled the sweet world's taste,
That it yields nought, but shame and bitterness.

Pand. Before the curing of a strong disease,
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest; evils, that take leave,
On their departure most of all show evil.

SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE had come to my heart a lightness such as the wretched perhaps only know—earth's heavy chains had loosened and let me go free. There is, I think, an etherial happiness which springs from accepted sorrow, which the most passionate indulgence of the joys of the world can never give. "We," writes the wise man of old, putting words into the mouth of the worldly and seemingly successful men, "counted their life madness;" not knowing how great a gain they had really found, who humbly, and tranquilly, and hopefully went

on their despised course, having a great end in view.

It seemed to me as if the mists had cleared from my way, and that I saw my duty at last. I had struggled for such a light too passionately—too much in my own way—but still struggled, and at last I had had courage to tell Brice fearlessly of his fault, and to offer to help him. I determined that I would do so honestly and well, and so far as possible with no thought of myself, but bending my whole efforts to lead him to better things and surer principles. With the inconsistency of affection, I began immediately to count upon Brice's return that evening, to imagine to myself the little scene that would follow : his confession of his fault and promise of amendment, and then to my taking a new place by the side of my self-sustained husband. Even while forced to condemn him, I remembered with tenderness his long and constant courtship of myself, which could not have been

simulated, for no motive could have led him against his will to seek me being poor.

And so out of these remembrances grew the sweet thought, that I might win him back in time by the gentleness of my well tempered affection, and that in the years to come when we—a white-haired man and woman—sat opposite each other in our easy chairs by the fire, he would then come to know for how much he had to be grateful to me.

How easy it seems to the young to grow old, forgetting that such a winter is only reached through a summer and autumn of middle life, and that that middle life is capable of taking such heavy payment for a youth which has been thrown away.

Such retribution, as could it be well set down, would, if fear of punishment ever did so, deter men from wrong.

For myself, at that time, I thought of old age as if Brice's brown curls could suddenly have snowed themselves over, knowing no previously shading, by Time's heavy fingers.

The day wore away, and as dinner time came, and I knew Brice would come, I grew painfully sensitive; to dream about him early in the morning was quite another thing to actually meeting his bodily presence. I had ever had a wholesome fear of giving him offence, and it seemed terrible to me that I should now have to see him in the wrong, and cowering, as it were, before me. I said he was sure to come; of course he would, but there was no step upon the gravel walk, no hand upon the latch of the gate, and that day I ordered up the dinner and made a pretence of eating it as if the master's being away was a circumstance easily to be accounted for.

But while I did so I was conscious of hypocrisy, and there stole upon me a new shame—a sense of desertion—that feeling of being exposed to all the coarse remarks of a terribly censorious world, and I wondered to myself would Ann and Betsy talk of it together, would they whisper to the milkman that master had not come home; and could

I humble myself to beg them to say no word of it to any one.

So the night slowly came on, and there was no letter nor message, and the house was closed for the night ; and the silent hours went by, and the early daylight came, and I rose to meet a new day; and my countenance told terrible tales of anxiety and watchfulness, and Ann's eyes questioned me—not harshly now. I think she had come to forgive me for sending away the dinner by that time, and she began to be troubled for me, for I found that though she liked her own way, she loved me well, and in a kind of patronising way, said I was the best mistress she had ever had, always taking it for granted that a mistress was a kind of subservient thing, who, though she could say a few pretty words in commendation, could not do the thing she commended, let her try ever so much.

Breakfast, and no letter. I began to remember the post deliveries, the times at which

I had received certain letters, perhaps for weeks past; but this knowledge did not serve me. The day went by as the last had done, only that the elasticity of my spirits gave way before a dreadful foreboding which I could not control.

To-morrow papa would return, and beyond the morrow I resolved I would not wait without seeking counsel of him. He loved Brice, and though I should have, perhaps, to dethrone the cherished object of his affections, he would yet save him, I knew, as he had saved many another, if he was yet to be saved.

But oh! the miserable hours! I could not bear to look upon my innocent child, remembering how she might live to blush for her own father, and I made some excuse for sending her away earlier than usual that evening; and then I remained seated by the fire, his empty chair opposite to me, clenching my hands together, and wringing them to bring

myself to a sense of my bodily presence, for I had a dreadful feeling, as if my entrails had perished in the extremity of my anguish, and had left me all spirit, with but a sense of pain to represent that I still had a body left. Heaven in its mercy save you, my friends, from such an anguish as I suffered then.

Who can tell what I conjured up. If he was gone, the news would not tarry long, some evil tongue—and what tongue would not be evil which so came to me—would soon enough be found to tell it. If he had complicated his affairs, and so gone too proud to ask for the help I had ready at hand? Then, too, some one would come soon to ask for him; until then I must be quiet, taking no step which should in any way compromise him. And with this dreary conclusion I sat wringing my hnnds, trying to keep myself from shivering.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Though thoughts, deep-rooted in my heart
  Like pine trees dark and high
Subdue the light of noon, and breathe
  A low and ceaseless sigh.

This memory brightens o'er the past,
  As when the sun, concealed
Behind some cloud that near us hangs,
  Shines on a distant field.

LONGFELLOW.

There passed a step along the hall,
And Eva started as if all
Her treasures, secret until now,
Burnt in the blush upon her brow.
There was a something in their meeting,
A conscious trembling in her greeting,
As coldness from his eye might hide
The struggle of her love and pride;
Then fears of all too much revealing
Vanished with a reproachful feeling.

LANDON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAD so sat, letting the weary time go by, for how long I cannot tell, when I heard what caused me to start to my feet, as if—yes, it had come to that—it was the very strangest sound I could hear ; and this was, or should have been, the most natural thing of all, it was Brice's key in the latch of the door.

I had so given him up, that his coming terrified me, and banished all my brave resolutions. I could only think of my letter, and his possible anger at receiving it—now that he was no runaway—but had come home

like the master he always had been, to his own house.

I stood still upon the hearth rug, and was so standing when he came in. I did not know how he had taken my letter, and, indeed, if it had convicted him, I felt that it was he who should approach me, at least, with the form of repentance. I did not, therefore, move or speak. As he came in I saw that he was pale, anxious, and wearied, as a man might be supposed to be who had come out of some great conflict. His eyes met mine at once, and I am afraid my fear made me look sullen, for he was evidently disappointed that I gave him no further greeting.

He came up to me, however, and stood by my side, leaning back upon the mantel-shelf with his arm, still looking at me and reading me, so it seemed, like the aggrieved master—I could not but think—more than the offender suing for pardon.

"You have frightened me very much," I said, feeling how painful the silence was.

"I frightened you!" he repeated; "how could that be—you had my letter?"

"Yes, your first; you said you would come or write again."

"And I did write again, telling you I was detained."

"I did not get any second letter, and, of course, I thought you were not coming home."

Here, I think, there was something like a sob choking up into my throat. I had been so wretched, and he seemed so indifferent.

"But you knew that if I did not come I was detained by business," he answered, looking at me very attentively. "I have had two causes of detention—one only concerns myself, and that I will tell you another time; the other touches you more nearly, and I may as well tell you now."

"Have you been away from the city all this time?" I asked, painfully; for I wished to know if he had seen my letter.

"Since Tuesday," he said.

"When you went away, did you mean to go," I said, eagerly, "when you looked so round the room? I thought afterwards you were saying good-bye to it."

He looked at me in surprise.

"I felt ill when I left that morning, and perhaps some sickly thoughts came over me; but I have managed to shake off any sickness which might have been coming—I have had too much to do to think of myself."

He had not had my letter—oh! what should I do!—and it was waiting for him, and he would see it to-morrow. Could I tell him to night—he who seemed so unlike a culprit standing up before me, so occupied with other thoughts, and seemingly waiting to be questioned?

"What took you—you away then?" I asked.

"On Tuesday," he said, "I received a note from Meta, entreating me to call on my way

home. I did call, of course, but there was no Meta, only a note."

He stopped; my attention was aroused and directed from myself.

I now looked at him eagerly; in spite of all her wilfulness I loved Meta dearly, and could not be indifferent to anything which concerned her—the days of our girlhood were still too near for its old associations to be broken; Brice, too, had forgotten himself, and the coolness which had been between us, in his eagerness to screen me from pain.

"Meta's note told me," he went on, after a pause, "that Mr. Masterman and she had quarrelled; he had left her, and she had determined to leave his house, and without waiting for me, as she intended, she had gone down to Harwich to the McPhinn's. That was the note. I found she had not taken her maid, and I sent for her; the girl was really vexed, and told me everything. Neither Mr. Masterman nor Meta could, I think, control them-

selves enough to quarrel privately, and all the house knew of the master's violence, and our Meta's scorn of it: so far as I could make out the quarrel was about nothing after all. I found that Mr. Masterman was expected back on the morrow, and that he had merely refused to take Meta with him on a visit to his brother. This was not leaving her, you know ?"

"No, no," I said, tremulously: had I not thought that he who stood before me now so masterly and so strong, as if rooted to his own hearth, had left me ?—and alas! for poor Meta, who had no love to guide her!

"And what did you do?" I asked; strange it was that as I looked at him I never for a moment doubted that he had done what was wisest and best.

"I wrote to you," he answered, "and then went down to Harwich. I found Meta alone at the hotel—the McPhinns had gone on to Rotterdam—embarrassed and ashamed at her

own impetuosity and repentant already, and so anything I had to say was saved; she told me all I could have urged, and then said my arguments were none of them so convincing as my presence. Meta, who is one of the most provoking of women when she chooses, made herself most agreeable, and we had a charming supper, talking the matter over meanwhile. I think the journey and the sea air did me good, and in the morning I had a bathe, and we came back to town by the earliest train which our fashionable sister could be expected to use."

"And you took her home?" I said.

"Yes, and in her very most conciliatory humour, I had persuaded her that a wit such as hers would be best displayed by managing her husband's temper rather than in attempting to rule it; and she will certainly behave well until—well, until the next time. I have since ascertained that her husband returned half-an-hour after herself, and that she re-

ceived him as she told me like an injured dove—any way—all trouble is removed for the present.

"And then," I said, "you neither returned home nor went to the office?"

"No, I had other business on hand, which I will not speak of to-night."

When Brice said he would not speak of a thing, I should like to see the woman who would have made him.

He had saved my sister from one of the most imprudent steps which a virtuous woman can take, and I should have been very grateful, but I was thinking of my letter—my impassioned letter, which he had not seen, he being in the meanwhile engaged in saving the reputation of another household. I might have written to Mr. Brook, the clerk, whom I had saved, and who had since done his duty well, but in order to do this, I must, at least, pledge him to secrecy. I must, to obtain this pledge, post a letter secretly, and secrecy was

repugnant to my character; I must abide by the issue of what I had written.

I was, therefore, very gloomy, for to abide the issue was very dreadful to me; but Brice, I think, considered that such gloom was due to Meta's conduct, and did not wonder at it.

I had thought myself so good and brave to send this letter, and now how heartily I wished it re-called.

The master sitting at his supper, giving his quiet orders to his servant, was so unlike the hero of the tragedy which I had been building up, that I think at that moment I would willingly have put all jealousy away for ever, if only that letter had not been written. As it was written, however, it could not become me to be happy and grateful for my husband's return, as I would gladly have been, nor could I feel so sociable as I felt inclined. I could talk of Meta, for that was an open subject, but beyond that I felt it wise to be reticent.

The very manner with which Brice sent for the steel before he would carve his cold beef, seemed a convincing proof that he was not at all the kind of being who would forego the comforts of a home for any romance, however wild and tempting. He looked in every sense a man whose passions were under strict control.

He had come so near to me in his confidence, and had seemed to forget altogether our coldness ; but yet, we did not understand each other. I saw to all his comforts, but I would then as soon have laid my hand amongst his short brown curls, as I would have placed it in a lion's mouth.

Oh! my dear Brice! my dear love! it had come even to that.

CHAPTER XIX.

Prec. Is this a dream? O, if it be a dream,
Let me sleep on, and do not wake me yet!
Repeat thy story! Say I'm not deceived!
Say that I do not dream! * * *
* * * * * *
* * * * * *

Vict. It is a dream, sweet child! a waking dream
A blissful certainty a vision bright
Of that rare happiness, which even on earth
Heaven gives to those it loves.

LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER XIX.

I DID have the courage the next morning—blushing like a girl of seventeen, and not like the matron of two-and-twenty which I really was—to ask Brice this favour, that he would put into the fire the letter which he would find on his going to the city.

He looked at me wonderingly with that old trouble in his eyes which had vanished under the excitement of travel, and would give me no satisfactory answer; and so, when he was gone, I had nothing for it but to be as courageous as I could.

I knew now how dearly I loved him, how willingly I would have gathered myself into his strong arms and laid all my weakness upon his great strength; but not doing this, shading myself in my old reserve, I felt and knew that he had understood as painfully as myself that the barrier between us had erected itself again, and that the momentary confidence had vanished.

Then, when he was gone—he not staggering as he had done, but strong with a strength which seemed to say it would no longer be ruled by a woman's weakness—I, oh! how I loved and pined after his love, which I had, as it were, put from me; not choosing to let him do wrong things, not caring to sacrifice my sense of right to my love, willing to punish both him and myself if so I might save him. And yet there had come now a strong doubt to my mind of the justice of my condemnation; the man himself was strong evidence against even his own words.

To look at Brice and to be in his presence it seemed impossible to doubt him. So I said to myself, wishing—wishing that I might recall my letter. It was too impassioned, too romantic, I thought, for such eyes as his.

However, as the thing was done, I could now only do my best to mend it, and my woman's nature told me that it would be well to make myself pleasing in his eyes, if such could still be possible, and of late I had only too sadly neglected my personal appearance. It was very warm again, and the cold autumn days which had seemed like the coming of winter, had given way before a short fresh lease of summer, which was in itself very delightful. There was scarcely a breath of air to steal in through the open windows of my little drawing-room, when I took my seat there early in the afternoon.

I had dressed myself in white spotted

muslin, it suited the weather, and he liked nothing so well as white, and a blue riband here and there relieved the whiteness. I think the dress was too dainty for my tiny house; but it suited my new wealth, and mamma, impatient of my self-neglect, had made me a present of it, but I had never cared to put it on until to-day, when I felt forced to put out all my armour, if it were but possible, to win my husband back.

If I only could. I had felt so old lately—so cold and reserved; to-day I was but a poor, weak, impassioned girl, weary of standing on her dignity, if it could only be wisely put aside; until that yesternight I had hardly fully realised what Brice was to me, if only I might put from him his faults.

I had so lost myself in thinking, my book lying open, but unread, before me; when, and yet it was still only early afternoon, the door opened and shut behind him, and he came in—at that moment there was but one

in all the world to me—it was my husband. I looked up; would he scare me for ever with that anger which I had always so dreaded, and yet had never more than glanced at.

In a moment I saw no anger, but that radiance all over his face which I so loved to see, and had not seen for so long a time, and my own eyes fell again, my cheeks all blushing with the burden of a love I had never thought to feel again.

Brice came up to me, and drawing a chair near me made himself in a moment such a comfortable seat as enabled him in the easiest manner possible to bring himself close to my small self, his strong arm about my waist.

I stole a look at my merchant husband, and saw that his eyes were dancing with a new light, and that there was more triumph and satisfaction in his manner than I had ever seen before, so that I felt my courage rise. What had my poor letter done that it should have made him look so happy?

"So you do really love me after all, little wife?" he said, pressing his arm closer. "Why did you make me doubt it all along?"

"Doubt me!" I exclaimed, astonished to see the tables turned upon me in this fashion.

"Did you not," he said, "let me rest in the belief that if your wealth had come before you would not have married me?"

"Oh! Brice; but I was so vexed, so angry with you—how could you do it?"

"I was very foolish, but unless you had spoken out, how could I tell that you were not making yourself miserable for having married a man in trade. Meta told me, you know."

"Never mind Meta," I said, trying to be severe. "You know now, I see it in your face, that you have no belief in such idle tales. You know, or look as if you did, that I would have married you if I could, had I been a king's daughter; but you—you—"

Here I turned aside my head to hide my

tears; but he drew me close to him, and I—ah! did I not love him.

"Do not turn from me," he said. "Be sure you have nothing to be ashamed of, but my foolish habit of keeping my own council and my troubles when they do come; but even they are all gone now."

I looked up at him still puzzled.

"I see that you expect an explanation, darling, but you shall not have one yet. First of all, I have a right to my grievance. Did you not change towards me directly the new wealth came?"

I was going to speak, but he gently interrupted me.

"At least, hear my impression of the matter. It did so appear that you were changed at that time. Meta told me you sorely repented your marriage. I did not believe her, and yet her words troubled me, for she had been with you. I returned home; you met me with contemptuous re-

serve. Still, upon a matter which so intimately concerned me, I could not be silent. I told you what Meta had said Need I tell you that I expected to feel your dear arms about my neck, and to see your head in its old resting place. Instead of which your answer was an evasion, and it wounded me deeply. Take love from marriage, and what is left—something so awful that one can give it no name—and to this it appeared that we were reduced. Still, of this I was guiltless, and when I came out of the agony of mind into which I had fallen, I resolved to have patience, hoping that a better mind would come to you, that you would in time see how innocent I had been of all intention to injure you."

"Oh! Brice!" I said; but he would not let me speak.

"You know what followed. You know that in the arrangement of the money which your generous father gave us, you showed a dis-

trust which amounted to an offence which I could not fail to notice, and that you treated me with the confidence you would have bestowed upon a spendthrift. I knew your reason, and I said to myself that you had some excuse. Then came our Sundays—your absence from church, shewing me—for I read you well—how impossible it was for you to forgive me. And then your reserve—your coldness. Ah! had I not good cause to be aggrieved!"

"Oh! Brice," I murmured; "you understand me now; you know—my letter—"

"Yes, love! but you must make me an atonement. First, your trust; afterwards, my explanation. Look in my face; am I that fearful hypocrite you have taken me for? Taking in evidence, even what you have heard and seen, do you still doubt me? I must have that; I will have you believe in me, my very self. Look at me, love!"

I raised my face, burning with the weight

of my own blushes. Could I doubt that manly look, that steadfast bearing, those loving eyes; I stole up my arm and wound it about his neck.

"Remember," he went on, and I could see a smile of superb triumph playing about his mouth, that mouth which was all sweetness, and which his young beard had not yet learned to hide, "that this is all-important to me, though not so important as that truth which I have already gleaned from your sweet, passionate, but accusing letter. You do love me, my darling! my dear life! I know that for myself; give yourself the precious consolation of saying, where I love I believe. Surely, you do not doubt me."

Here his strong arms pressed me towards him with the tenderness which an infant would have needed.

"I am to believe no evidence against you, not even your own," I whispered.

"None!" he answered, steadily, "for

cannot, you, in a moment, tell me what you find fault with. My darling! I would so humble myself, if I knew how, that you should never be afraid of me again."

"You cannot," I said; "there is a majesty about you which will grow with your age, and which you cannot put away from you."

"Cannot you then take it as an evidence in my favour," he said, with the same smile playing about his mouth; "but do you not see that if you are going to be afraid to the end of the chapter, it is the more necessary that you should trust me—as I shall trust you in all your haughty moods. It is enough that you love me; and you—I shall punish you, I have got your secret, sweetest wife; but of mine, you shall not know a word, until you say you believe me without a doubt."

To hear him thus talking in his easiest manner, was to feel nothing but one's own folly, and shame, and remorse.

"Forgive me, my own love," I whispered,

Brice's answer was such a shower of kisses, as made me feel that in that large heart of his there was no room for malice, and that I was far more than forgiven.

CHAPTER XX.

But lovely concord, and most sacred peace,
Doth nourish virtue, and fast friendship breedes
Weake she makes strong, and strong things does increase,
Till it the pitch of highest praise exceeds.
Brave be her warres, as honourable deedes,
By which she triumphs over ire and pride,
And winnes an olive girlond for her meeds.

SPENSER.

CHAPTER XX.

The renewed confidence between us was so beautiful, so tender, and so fresh, that I hesitated to disturb it by a word. It was not, therefore, until the evening had fully closed in, long after baby had been admired, fondled, and sent off to her bed, that Brice resumed the conversation of the evening. The curtains were drawn, and the fire, which my husband, like a true family man, delighted in, was kindled in the dining-room; for, though the days were warm, the nights were chilly, and we were sitting cozily at dessert. He

had his glass of port wine now, though served in the homely decanter which had marked our first days, for nothing as yet was much changed about us — except, indeed, that I gave him nicer things—and that now he was cracking fresh filberts.

"I know you wonder at my silent habits," Brice said then, taking up the subject of my curiosity, with rather a mournful air—"but my silence, I think, was first acquired by the necessities of my early youth. I was the son of a poor gentleman, who entered upon the hard business of life, without any actual profession. Life is difficult with those who have a calling in it—it is doubly difficult to those who have none. My mother had a little money, but not much; and she, dying early, left my father a broken hearted man, and me a mere infant. He married again; such marriages are not singular, I believe; but his was an unhappy one. He followed my mother within a few months of his second marriage.

I was then left, with what little money remained to me, to the care of a hard stepmother. I would not willingly speak of her, for to speak is to blame. She led me a very hard life; and I fear would not have been sorry if I, a weak defenceless child, had sunk under her ill-treatment—for the little fortune I possessed would, in that case, have been her own. Unfortunately for her, as she supposed then, I was a hardy child, and nothing but actual murder would have killed me. I seemed to thrive upon ill-treatment."

Brice paused; and I looked at him wonderingly, feeling certain that what he had said was in some way connected with the subject which had so heavily troubled me.

"In the course of time," he went on, seeming to contend with bitter memories; "she married again, and for a while I had some peace. I was allowed to attend the St. Olive's Grammar School, which is free to the parish in which we had come to live; and there, you

may be sure, I made the best use of my time, for school was the only place like home which I could call my own. My new father, for so he called himself, for a while, was all kindness—for my own father had, unfortunately, made him my sole trustee, and he obtained possession of the little money I had, and he spent it merrily. When that was gone, we had a sad time of it—my new little sister and I. The man who could rob the orphan entrusted to him was not likely to stop short there. He went from bad to worse, until our home became a continual scene of wretchedness. I need not enter into his low and pitiful shifts for very life, or the cruel treatment to which I was subjected. Sufficient, that I ran away, and that after many and painful trials, I found a place as mere errand boy in a city office."

"You! my poor Brice," I murmured.

"Not poor then," he said; "the worst of my life was over. I never minded work, and I rose rapidly; my education was good for

my age, and I lost no opportunity of improving it. Years went on; and I was tempted to return to see after the only connections I had ever known. I found them sunk lower still in the scale of humanity—he getting his living by hanging about courts and sale-rooms, and so forth—I felt ashamed of the whole affair; but I made up my mind to help them if it were still possible. My young sister might be made something of, I thought, and I determined to educate her. I did so; and as my earnings increased, I gave her more and more advantages, until she was well fitted to become a governess."

"Esther?" said I, reddening with shame.

He answered, "Yes," carefully looking at his filberts, and not at me.

"I did the best to have eradicated from her mind the faults of her early training, but I fear I did not well succeed. They were her real parents, you see, and she had, of course, a natural leaning to them; still, she was the daughter of the

woman who had been my father's wife. I did not know how much I burdened myself with when I renewed the connection. Mr. Butler was constantly borrowing money, which, of course, never really helped him, and when Esther was provided for, I refused to have anything more to do with him; changed my private address, my business one he had never known, and so hoped that I had cut off this annoyance from myself.

"I succeeded in doing so, until our unfortunate visit to Mrs. Nelson; there, unexpectedly, I met my sister as you know. I had always considered her as such, and I still use the term. But to bring you into any connection with this family, not really my relatives as you perceive, I had no intention. I enjoined Esther to keep our meeting a secret from her father, but I doubt that she did so, and the letter I would not shew you was a petition for help for him, under one of the emergencies into which he was perpetually throwing himself.

"You see my accounts were then in your hands, and I refused to yield, knowing that no good would come of it. The result was one, which I had certainly not anticipated. I found very soon, to my dismay, that bills, bearing my signature, were in the market. I need scarcely tell you that these signatures were forged—and by that unhappy man.

"I met my sister, by appointment, in Kensington Gardens. I was forced to frighten her, for I think she was at first unable to see her father's guilt in the right light. Need I go on—you know why I resorted to the doubtful expedient of a private book. How much against my will, you could not tell; but I could neither betray him, nor permit you to join me in shielding a criminal. Let me tell you, rather, the happy result; the evening before last, I accompanied them to Gravesend—Mr. and Mrs. Butler and Esther—and remained with them until the ship sailed. They take with them ample means

with which to establish themselves in Australia, and free me of a heavy responsibility."

"Why," said I, with a little hesitation, "did Miss Butler leave Mrs. Phillimore so hastily?"

"It was her way," Brice answered, sadly, "to do things as no one else would do them. She had ample time to have given a longer notice, but it was not until yesterday that I learned that she did not do so. I am sorry to say I do not trust Esther, though I like her well; but I would not have had her know my wife. That is the whole of the sad story—and now tell me, am I so very much to blame?"

"A little—just a little, dear," I said; "husbands and wives should have no secrets."

"Perhaps you are right, dear love," he answered; "I should be very sorry to think that your mistrust was without excuse."

"I should have told you," I whispered, stealing my hand into his. "I should never have been afraid to speak, and then you would have told me; at least, say that."

"My darling, I would not have caused you such pain for the world," was the gentle answer, for no man I found in all the years to come was ever so merciful as my dear husband, and he would have shut his eyes, I think, to all my faults, if he could.

"It was almost worth the pain," I said "to know; how good you are. You come out of the fire only the brighter and the better."

"Trust me, darling, in the future," he said, gently and sweetly; "in that future which may have so many temptations for us, for I think now that we understand each other at last, we must learn to be rich with a good grace. You must take upon you the cares and troubles of wealth."

"Willingly, upon one condition."

"Name it; you know I can refuse you nothing."

"You will forgive me about the money and will use it as your own."

Brice looked very grave, but I had my way for all that, and can say with satisfaction

that I have never drawn a check or used money which did not first come through his hands.

So that was the meaning of it all; while I was building up accusation upon accusation against him, he had been acting a part of almost womanly self-devotion and delicacy. I had scarcely time to think these thoughts out before the truth seemed to burst upon me like a tide sweeping away for ever the dark and bitter jealousy which I had so moodily fostered, and twining my arms about his neck, I begged him all humbly to forgive me, and to wipe out from his remembrance the cruel memory of these last months.

"My darling," answered my husband, "it will be only too easy; did I not say once that everything could be forgiven to true love, and I know now that you love me with all your dear heart."

CHAPTER XXI.

The book is completed,
  And closed, like the day;
And the hand that has written it
  Lays it away.

Dim grow its fancies,
  Forgotten they lie:
Like coals in the ashes,
  They darken and die.

LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER XXI.

As I pause here, looking back upon this period of my life, one more picture rises up to my mind and stands out in pleasant colours.

It was the day after our reconciliation, when my heart was brimming over with happiness, that I was sitting in my little drawing-room alone. Baby had just left me for her afternoon airing, and I was free, while pretending to occupy myself in needle work, to build a hundred pleasant castles. Now that peace and love had come to my life, now that

I honoured my husband, and despised myself, finding new beauties in his character to move my admiration, I could appreciate our wealth which had been as nothing to me, as fresh room for gall and bitterness only yesterday. I could think of the pleasant villa Mrs. Phillimore had spoken of, and which we could buy if we so chose, and where there would be such a fine airy nursery. I was thinking of the company we would gather round us there, and the old friends we would seek out. Not valuing what we had once lost and now recovered too highly, but appreciating it nevertheless.

In all the future one central figure was standing out, to be reverenced and loved more and more as the days went on, when my day dreams were interrupted by the entrance of Ann, who told me a lady wished to see me, and presently upon my permission, she ushered in a gentle timid girl.

"I did not send in my name," she said,

hesitatingly, "because you would not have known it, but Mr. Brook—"

I gave her all my attention now, I knew that Brice was pleased with Brook, had trusted him by degrees, watching him constantly, and found him very useful.

"Yes," I answered, "I am always glad to hear of Mr. Brook, do you come from him?"

"Partly from him, but oh! so much more from myself," she said, speaking with the enthusiasm which is often to be seen in usually quiet natures. "I wanted to thank you, to tell you all you have done for me as well as for him."

"Yes, my dear," I said, gently, but assuming the matron nevertheless.

"I knew it all," she went on, clasping her hands together. "After you saw him he told me everything, how he had fallen into temptation and how you had rescued him. We were to have been married then, but of course I could not, how could I trust him then, but

ever since he has been such a different man. Oh! madam, it was you who saved him, and I want you so much—" She hesitated.

"Tell me what you want?" I said.

"Oh! if you could spare the time, if you and Mr. Glynn would not mind it very much, we would take it as such an honour if you would come to our wedding!"

"You do me a great kindness to ask me," I said, "and if Mr. Glynn can spare the time I think I can promise for him as for myself."

She thanked me eagerly. "Mr. Glynn is such a noble man," she said; "Robert told me that when masters did all sorts of tricks in the course of business, and called it the way of trade, it was hardly to be wondered at that those who served them learned to be dishonest, too; but that Mr. Glynn set him an example he would be ashamed not to follow, for, said he, he never does a thing, let trade be ever so bad, that a child would blush at—never. There is no telling the

good he does—no counting up his kindly ways; but he and you, madam, have done what I shall thank you for, I hope, all my life long. When Mr. Glynn gets to the top of the tree he will be a merchant prince, indeed; that is what Robert says often and often. Then I may tell him that you will come; I am so glad," she said, rising. "We will suit the day to Mr. Glynn's convenience."

"You can tell him so," I said smiling; "but I think he will like best that you should suit your own."

We went to the wedding, Brice and I, and the present he took his clerk's young wife did no discredit to his liberality. Need I say how happy it made me to see him the trusted honoured master, and to feel that now not even I, his wife, could lay my hand upon a wilful flaw. It was there my happiness lay then and afterwards; not in the money which came to us in abundance. I had known how

valueless money may be, and I have never set my heart upon it, though we have grown very rich, for money makes money as the snow ball collects snow.

Those who see us now, well to do, prosperous and easy, may look upon our state as too smooth and prosy, perhaps, but I think if all spoke out we should find that there falls into most lives a romance, which has worked its purpose perhaps far out of sight.

Certainly it has been so for us. Troubles have come as they have come to all; but never again have we had to fight them single-handed—never again has that strong bond been broken which has bound us together through life, and will bind, I trust, unto death.

THE END.

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